TRADE, STATE, AND RELIGION IN EARLY MODERN INDIA: DEVOTIONALISM AND THE MARKET ECONOMY IN THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

by

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TRADE, STATE, AND RELIGION IN EARLY MODERN INDIA: DEVOTIONALISM AND THE MARKET ECONOMY IN THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

Brendan P. LaRocque

Under the supervision of Professor Andre Wink
At the University of Wisconsin-Madison

This dissertation addresses several interrelated issues currently of central concern in research on early modern South Asian history. This includes debates concerning the nature of the Mughal empire's efforts toward administrative centralization and subsequent imperial decline, the role and impact of commercialization and trade, and the social import of religious traditions. The present study offers an innovative explanation of the relationship between devotional religious movements and the commercial economy in the Mughal empire. My central contention is that the nature of the expansion of a market economy, and the response of the state to this growth, can be better understood through an examination of documents related to the burgeoning devotional groups of the period. In this work I demonstrate how documents which have been traditionally primarily valued for what they reveal about religious life can be used to shed light on political and economic history as well.

Devotional religious traditions played a central, but often overlooked role in the development of the market, in struggles over group status and identity, and in processes of political representation during the period of Mughal rule. Devotional movements openly challenged the hegemony of the hierarchical caste system, attacking its restrictions on interaction between people of different social backgrounds, a necessary prerequisite for the expansion of a market economy. These movements also helped establish links between merchants living in geographically dispersed areas. Devotional movements became, in a period of rapid commercialization and social flux, popular associations that both promoted and responded to the position of upwardly mobile groups from a variety of religious backgrounds. In doing so, these movements embodied an emergent collective identity, one marked by religious inclusivism and opposition to the caste system. The leaders of these groups also served as the representatives through whom followers sought to convey their interests to the imperial establishment. In their interactions with Mughal officials, such leaders also mediated the exercise of imperial sovereignty to their devotees, while simultaneously representing the devotional group's loyalty to the empire.

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INTRODUCTION

Trade, State, and Religion in the Mughal Empire

Introduction

Studies of early modern India have long debated the nature and significance of commercialization during the years of Mughal rule. The Mughal Peace, combined with a high level of monetization, nurtured a strong market economy, generating immense wealth in the subcontinent. But researchers have had to contend with the fact that one of the more important sources of documentation for the Mughal period, official imperial chronicles, have little to offer those interested in the history of trade. The official Mughal histories promulgate an imperial ideology linked to land and military service in the cause of the empire and Islam, and rarely deign to comment upon commercial life. Consequently, the extensive records written by the European trading companies have been heavily relied upon to provide much of the hard economic data relating to the period. Yet the paucity of indigenous documents relating to merchant and artisan communities is often cited as setting limits on our understanding of the social and political history of commerce. My study aims to demonstrate how an examination of the history and literature of devotional movements in the Mughal period can shed some light on these issues.

This introduction begins with a brief discussion of the aims of this study, a survey of recent Mughal historiography, followed by a critical review of the debate on the Mughal state and its relationship with the commercial economy. I then discuss my approach to the study of the Mughal state and its policies related to commerce and religion. Finally, I describe how this study looks at religious history and literature in order to discern the role of

religion in the expansion of a market economy, and in state policies of centralization.

This study represents a departure from most studies of the political and economic history of Mughal India which tend to pay little attention to religious movements.[1] While by no means ignored altogether in contemporary studies, religion is typically dealt with as of secondary importance for understanding what are seen as more basic developments in the politics and economy of Mughal India. At the same time, studies which take precolonial religion as their main object of concern tend to examine it largely in isolation from political and economic phenomena. I should like to emphasize here that I am not arguing that studies which analyze religion apart from political and economic contexts, and vice versa, are by that fact necessarily methodologically inadequate or theoretically deficient. Recent scholarship has, without question, greatly increased our understanding of numerous developments in Mughal state and society. Rather, it is my intention to demonstrate how an approach which highlights and makes sense of the interface between several spheres of social belief and action - religious, political, and economic - can provide an innovative perspective which will shed new light on some unresolved aspects of Mughal history.

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[1] The role and significance of religion for community formation, trade, peasant and artisan labor, politics and nationalism, and a host of other issues are, in contrast, quite central to recent writings on colonial era India. See e.g., William Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley, 1996); Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras* (Delhi, 1996); Claudia Leibeskind, *Piety on its Knees: Three Sufi Traditions in South Asia in Modern Times* (Delhi, 1998); David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley, 1988); Barbara Metcalfe, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton, 1982); Harjit Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago, 1994); Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan and His Movement, 1870-1920* (Delhi, 1996); Freitag, Sandra, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley, 1989); J.R.I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859* (Berkeley, 1988); Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi, 1990); Sarah Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843-1947*; David Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars* (Berkeley, 1994).

Revisionist Historiography and Mughal Decline

Over the past several decades, research focusing on the nature of the Mughal state has added to our knowledge of the structure and operations that underlie this powerful early modern empire. Studies of the Mughals have analyzed the various aspects of revenue administration, including the means by which taxes were assessed, collected, and allocated, with attention given to the variations in this system according to time and region. The manner and degree of integration into the imperial structure of regional and local elites has likewise been scrutinized, and the means by which a cohesive nobility of diverse background was created and bound to the emperor has also been more fully elaborated.

It is, however, the process of imperial decline and the rise of successor-states that has attracted the greatest attention of historians in recent years. Earlier studies tended to see Mughal collapse as leading to social instability and economic decline throughout the erstwhile imperial lands. This work, most prominently that of the "Aligarh school" historians, including Irfan Habib, M. Athar Ali, Satish Chandra, and others, located many of the immediate causes of decline during the reign of the emperor of Aurangzeb. In one view, imperial collapse was caused by the attempt to extend Mughal rule to the south of the subcontinent. The prolonged military campaigns drained the state treasury, and an influx of new members into the imperial ranks created a shortage of land available for prebendal assignment, as jagirs. Without adequate resources to meet these pressing demands, the state collapsed. In another view, the state's insatiable demands for revenue eventually spurred the oppressed peasantry to join hands with local landowners, zamindars, in armed rebellion. The consequent loss of an overarching political force led to endemic warfare, chaos, and

destruction.

Recent developments in the field of Mughal historiography, most notably the extensive challenge to received wisdom regarding the nature of Mughal decline, have focused historians' scrutiny on previously neglected aspects of early modern Indian society. In-depth regional histories in particular have supplanted an earlier period's more exclusive concern with the workings of the Mughal state system as seen from the point of view of the imperial actors and institutions themselves. Political and economic histories in this vein have in recent years presented work that substantially alters the previously accepted account of many of the basic features characterizing Mughal decline.[2] There is at this point in time a widespread, if not unanimous, scholarly consensus in favor of the revisionist view of Mughal collapse.[3] Since my study draws upon arguments made in this body of scholarship, it will be worthwhile to briefly sketch out the outlines of what can be considered the revisionist position.

The central claims put forth in the newer histories revolve around the notion that the disintegration of effective Mughal sovereignty and control in the early eighteenth century represented a process of political decentralization, with real power being relocated in regional state systems. At the same time, this body of work has amply demonstrated that the

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[2] See C.A. Bayly, Rulers, *Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion*; *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1983); Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of the Mughal Empire: Awadh and the Punjab* (Oxford, 1986); Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India. Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth Century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge, 1986); Sushil Chaudhury, *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal* (New Delhi, 1995); Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth Century India* (Oxford, 1994). Recent summaries and analyses of the development of the revisionist perspective include: S. Subrahmanyam and M. Alam (eds.), Introduction, *The Mughal State, 1526-1750* (Oxford, 1998); Andrea Hintze, *The Mughal Empire and Its Decline: An Interpretation of the Sources of Social Power* (Brookfield, 1997).

[3] A defense of the traditional view of Mughal decline appears in M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb*, Preface to the New Revised Edition (Oxford, 1997).

trajectories of regional states and economies subsequent to Mughal decline were not uniform, thereby replacing the earlier picture of overall political and economic decline, with a view that sees varied outcomes according to regional circumstances. Because regional developments are no longer assumed to be the predictable aftereffects of Mughal decline, revisionist writings have made their primary focus the various post-Mughal polities of the eighteenth century. Here, the relative success or failure of these regional states has been ascribed to several variable determinants. For example, the establishment of stable rule was to some degree predicated on the ability of regional rulers to come to terms with local magnates, especially zamindars. Likewise, the rising importance of standing, salaried armies meant that successful successor-states needed ready access to money supplies. This in turn meant that these states had to promote trade in their domains.

At the same time, though, the new perspectives on the eighteenth century have called into question, both implicitly and explicitly, certain assumptions about the nature of Mughal rule at its peak, in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. A central tenet of earlier studies held that the Mughal state was highly centralized and vastly powerful, to the point that any significant economic development was directly caused by actions of the royal and noble households. The state was further deemed capable of extracting virtually the entire agrarian surplus, enriching the imperial center while impoverishing the countryside. In this view, the monarchy was perceived as wielding near total control over the nobility, regularly shifting individual nobles' prebendal assignments, jagirs, to prevent them from developing local ties and bases of power independent of the emperor. But recent works have shown this to be an exaggeration of the power of the Mughal state, reflecting more the empire's self-

projection than its real capacities. Furthermore, recent studies have questioned the assumption that the commercialization of late-Mughal India was a purely destructive force. The fact that the period witnessed an increase in the buying and selling of rights to land revenue had previously been portrayed as a process that gave control to moneyed interests whose only concern was immediate extraction of revenue, uncoupled from a concern for improvement, or even maintenance, of a productive agricultural system.

The Debate on Trade and The Mughal State

Reading through the abundant historical literature on the relationship between merchants and rulers in the Mughal empire, one is struck by the lack of scholarly consensus on even the most basic issues. Were the Mughals strong supporters of commerce and close allies of traders, or were they indifferent or even hostile to mercantile concerns? Were merchant groups characteristically weak and fragmented, suffering frequent harassment and exploitation at the hands of their rulers? Or were they organized and aggressive in protecting their interests? Did merchant-bankers play a crucial role in the imperial revenue administration, or were they outsiders to that system? Did their actions contribute to the decline of the empire, or were they merely passive onlookers? Was the merchant lifestyle characteristically austere, or often ostentatious? Furthermore, what types of evidence should the historian look to for answers to these questions? Are the detailed observations of European travelers in the empire more likely misinformed than accurate? What kind of biases and omissions of fact can one expect to find in Mughal chronicles and memoirs? How important was ideology in dictating the actions of the rulers?

Any examination of the nature of the commercial economy in Mughal India will

have to reckon with many of these issues. But perhaps the most contentious question at the center of recent debates is: What was the relationship of the Mughal rulers and nobility to merchants and the commercial economy? A survey of the relevant literature will show that historians hold a wide range of views on this question, some in sharp opposition to one another. Competing claims are each bolstered by reference to distinct bodies of evidence, as well as by contrasting interpretations of the same sources of documentation. In addition to the differences of scholarly judgment which underlie these disagreements, however, the heat of debate is often kindled by a lack of conceptual clarity. A close reading of recent discussions reveals that on several key points scholars often argue at cross-purposes, thereby obscuring what exactly is being disputed. The fact that the available evidence, which is fairly extensive, brought to bear on this important issue has led to diametrically opposed conclusions, indicates that the issue's component parts need to be separated out and dealt with individually, before bringing them together to provide a more encompassing answer. It will therefore be worthwhile to review the state of the debate. The following survey is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of the scholarship on the subject. Nonetheless, I have selected these particular writings for discussion because I believe they adequately represent the range of views held concerning the Mughals and trade, and they include the most influential studies in this regard.

In a series of early articles, Satish Chandra emphasizes the positive impact on commerce of the Mughals' promotion of a money economy. He writes that Muslim rulers during the Delhi Sultanate period, due to their overwhelmingly land-based revenue system,

scorned commerce.[4] But under the Mughals, this attitude was dramatically changed, so that by the end of the sixteenth century an appreciation of trade appeared in the writing of emperor Akbar's historian and ideologue, Abu Fazl. This trend was further accelerated in the following century, with "the growing commercial-mindedness of the Mughal nobility" apparent from their frequent involvement in commercial undertakings.[5] Chandra regards the rather sudden interest and participation of Mughals in trade to be a result of their recognition of the income to be gained from such ventures. At the same time, he concludes, trade always remained a minor concern of the Mughals, dwarfed by the importance of income derived from agricultural revenue, so that they never gained an accurate understanding of the importance of trade for continued economic growth. Ultimately, their neglect of commercial policy contributed to the crisis and collapse of the empire. Although Chandra sees the seventeenth century in particular as a time of immense commercial growth, his own research on commerce in this period is primarily limited to the participation of the nobility and royalty in trade. He does not pursue questions related to specifics of non-Mughal merchants, or their relationship to the state, although he does venture to conclude that "As a class, on an all-India basis, the merchants were not rich or powerful enough to claim a share in state power."[6]

Irfan Habib has addressed some elements concerning merchant-ruler relations in his

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[4] "Some Aspects of the Growth of a Money Economy in India during the Seventeenth Century in India during the Seventeenth Century", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. III, No. 4 (1966).

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 158. See also his "Commercial Activities of the Mughal Emperors during the Seventeenth Century", Bengal: Past and Present, vol. LXXXVII, July-Dec. 1959.

[6] "Nature of Medieval Indian Society and the Jagirdari Crisis", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 1978, [p. 58]; see also his *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-1740*, 4th ed., (Oxford, 2002) p. 11.

much discussed article, "Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India," first published in 1969. Summing up the findings of the previous five decades of research on this question, Habib notes that "A strong body of scholarly opinion has held that merchants in Mughal India could not obtain sufficient or secure profits and accumulate wealth, owing to various political and administrative causes: insecurity of roads; the insecurity of merchants' property, it being threatened constantly by the avarice of the emperor and his nobles; high taxes; and, finally, interference with the conduct of free trade by Mughal officials, who established their monopoly in various lines of trade within the area under their jurisdiction."[7] Habib remarks that merchants undoubtedly faced such conditions of obstruction and risk; but what is really at question, he claims, is the degree to which such circumstances imperiled opportunities for trade. To answer this question, Habib identifies one element which is amenable to quantifiable measurement, from within this constellation of factors purported to threaten the viability of commerce: the security of roads. The instrument he employs for gauging this is the insurance rate applied to goods under transport, for which Habib provides precise figures for several main inland commercial arteries in the mid-seventeenth century. The rates given are quite low for the age (ranging from a .5% to 2.5% charge of the total cost of goods being transported), which indicates a relatively high degree of political stability. Habib goes on to note that "we cannot provide similar quantitative tests" for the other factors in question, and in their absence only issues a warning against making judgments, based upon fragmentary evidence, of commercial instability. In a later essay, Habib's evaluation of the subject is similarly restricted.

[7] "Potentialities", p. 223.

exemplified by his noncommittal statement that "The relationship of merchants and bankers with the Mughal empire was a complex one," followed by the observation that trade flourished due in large part to the structure of the imperial land-tax system. Habib also notes conflicts between merchants and Mughals "were possible" and merchants lacked significant opportunity for joining the ranks of the ruling elite.[8]

Approaching the issue from a methodologically different angle than Habib, Stephen Dale argues that Mughal policies provided optimal conditions for a flourishing commercial economy, with the imperial elite maintaining a "symbiotic relationship" with traders.[9] To the degree that Habib draws any definitive conclusions on the issue, he bases his assessment primarily on quantitative data. In contrast, Dale looks to the ideological components of Mughal governance to find evidence that reveal the rulers' stance on trade. Speaking at once of the Mughals, Safavids and Ottomans, he writes that "most rulers of these dynasties consistently implemented standardized political-economic policies that were designed to stimulate both internal and external trade."[10] Dale attributes the Mughals' presumed strong support for trade to several factors. First, the Mughals are seen as being direct heirs to the "traditional political economy of the Turco-Mongol rulers," which was characterized by a collaborative relationship between the rulers and merchant groups, and was manifest through similar "business alliances" in Mughal India.[11] Second, Dale claims that the Mughals manifested a pro-mercantile ethos shared by early modern Islamic regimes

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[8] "Forms of Class Struggle in Mughal India", p. 239.

[9] *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600-1750* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 30-41; p. 31.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

throughout Asia. This ethos was based in Islamic law which provided for contractual mercantile agreements, and created a framework that was highly conducive for trade. Communicated to rulers through the "mirrors for princes" literature as well as through letters of advice, *nasihat namas*, emperors were also encouraged to build a physical infrastructure for trade, including roads, bridges, and caravanserais. Third, he refers to the officials' simple desire to increase income, for both state treasuries and private profit. This was accomplished with the large sums of surplus cash amassed through taxation, which provided a ready means for Mughal rulers and nobles to invest in lucrative trade ventures. Dale also states that revenues derived from custom duties represented a substantial source of income for the state. Finally, Dale argues that trade in Mughal India was regarded as a noble pursuit, citing as evidence this statement by an early eighteenth century Khatri merchant: "Trade is many times better than nobility; nobility makes one subject while [in the profession of] trade one leads the life of a ruler."[12] Taken together, these factors combined to shape Mughal policy and practice regarding trade, which consistently ensured that political and economic conditions in the imperial lands remained highly favorable for mercantile pursuits.

Dale's claim that a number of Mughal officials were commonly involved, to some degree, in trade is uncontroversial, as this phenomenon is recorded in numerous documents of the period and has been discussed by many historians (although Dale claims that the degree of nobles' direct involvement in trade has been under-appreciated). But his interpretation of this information to draw more general conclusions about the political

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

economy of the empire engages a more contentious terrain, involving several claims that deserve close scrutiny. Dale ascribes much of the Mughal state's favorable treatment of traders to its conformity with "normative conduct for Islamic rulers regarding private property."[13] This attribution of motive assumes an exceptionally strong regulating role for legal principle. Recorded instances of the extortion of merchants' goods are in this view exceptions that prove the rule, and even then were resorted to only as a means to cope with periods of political instability, such as during the reigns of Babur and Humayun, when the Mughal dynasty had achieved only a tenuous political foothold. From Akbar onward, claims Dale, a securely established empire no longer felt the need to violate its own solicitous policy toward merchants and their property in such a manner. The difficulty with this argument is that it ignores the frequent instances (discussed below), during and after Akbar's reign, when Mughal officials did in fact extort money from merchants. Furthermore, Dale sidesteps the issue raised by the significant amount of Mughal writings, including official chronicles and memoirs, that openly disparage the commercial life.

These issues are dealt with by several historians who argue, in contrast to Dale's depiction of a commerce-friendly imperial elite, that the typical Mughal attitude toward trade was ambivalent at best, actively hostile at worst. Indeed, as mentioned in the Habib article cited above, there is a sizeable body of evidence ignored by Dale that contradicts his depiction of unstinting Mughal respect for trading groups. Tapan Raychaudhuri, Satish Chandra, M. Athar Ali, and J.F. Richards among others have also highlighted the numerous incidents of Mughal exploitation of merchants. Expanding upon the argument made in

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

earlier studies, this view claims that merchants were by no means secure in their property and person, lacking both legally sanctioned protections of property rights as well as meaningful political power. Merchants in this situation were perennially vulnerable to the whims of the Mughal rulers, who in the absence of any institutionalized restraints, were quick to harass merchants and extort money whenever the need arose. Moreover, these writers, in varying degrees, make the case that the involvement of rulers and nobles in trade was more likely than not to have a negative impact on the efficient working of the commercial system. Prone to abuse their political power to obtain highly favorable conditions for buying and selling, rulers that partook of trade, while profiting individually, could drive away merchants and distort the market process.

M. Athar Ali's research on this topic analyzes the position of commerce in Mughal India from the point of view of the aristocratic involvement in trade and production.[14] Athar Ali emphasizes that the Mughal nobility, with very rare exceptions, primarily derived their wealth and position from revenues drawn from agricultural production, not commerce. Nonetheless, the cash nexus that underpinned the Mughal economy generally, and revenue collection specifically, unavoidably put nobles in contact with the commercial economy, while placing an immense amount of money at the ready disposal of this ruling elite. This provided all the temptation needed for Mughals to "dabble" in trade in order to increase their already substantial wealth. However, in Athar Ali's interpretation, such aristocratic involvement in trade was ultimately more likely to be harmful than productive. As evidence, Ali cites cases of rulers extorting wealth, imposing monopolies and forced

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[14] Ali, *Mughal Nobility*, pp. 154-70; 172-73.

purchases, and practicing a general "abuse of their influence and authority".[15] Finally, the nobles' narrow interest in luxury goods at the expense of other commodities is seen as having hindered the development of innovative techniques of production. Because the subject of Athar Ali's study is the Mughal nobility, he does not aim to provide an analysis of the commercial economy apart from that group's involvement in, or interference with it. Nevertheless, his conclusion that "In trade and commerce corruption prevailed everywhere and no assistance was rendered by the authorities unless they were paid for it", gives the impression that the nobility's obstructions were highly debilitating to the commercial economy as a whole.[16]

Tapan Raychaudhuri, in his analysis of the Mughal economy in *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, draws a conclusion that falls somewhere in between that of Dale and Athar Ali, arguing for the essential ambivalence of the rulers' attitudes towards merchants. This situation, writes Raychaudhuri, derived from a "peculiar contradiction" built into the very structure of the empire. On the one hand, the Mughal military and administration required a physical infrastructure that was conducive to trade, although by chance, not design.[17] Furthermore, the prosperity of the empire as well as the commercial investments of individual nobles depended on a thriving market economy, which therefore had to be protected and at times even promoted with official support. At the same time, "the short-term interest of the individual *amir*, however, lay in the direction of maximum

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[15] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[17] *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I, c. 1200-1750, p. 182.

extortion in the minimum possible time."[18] Given this fundamental ambivalence at the heart of the Mughal attitude to trade, the only recourse left to merchants for defending their interests was the use of "contacts, bribes, organized action, and, perhaps above all, the spendthrift *amirs*' dependence on credit."[19] These remedies were sufficient, Raychaudhuri claims, to ensure that in the end merchants were indeed able to prosper without consistent or strong backing from the state. The final result was a "modus vivendi that had emerged over time to the advantage of both parties."[20]

In one sense, then, Raychauduri's assessment is in line with Stephen Dale's conclusion that nobles and merchants participated in a symbiotic relationship. But whereas Dale attributes this state of affairs to a sort of enlightened and age-old policy with roots in the rulers' ideological inheritances, Raychaudhuri portrays it as the functional outcome of a sort of reciprocal bullying between antagonists, with each party exploiting the other's weaknesses for their own gain. That this seemingly volatile arrangement remained workable was apparently due to an at least partial recognition by merchants and aristocrats that their respective occupations were interdependent.

Marking out a distinct line of argument from the scholars discussed above, M. N. Pearson, in his book *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, writes that merchants operated with a large degree of independence from the Mughal regime. Because it is sometimes overlooked, it should be emphasized that Pearson limits his conclusions, however, to western India, primarily coastal Gujarat. Pearson draws attention to the organization of merchant groups,

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[18] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

which provided a form of self-governance under the leadership of a person chosen from within the occupational group itself. When circumstances necessitated interaction with the state, this individual provided the "vertical" link with Mughal officials. But in the normal course of things, the imperial officials would grant "a large degree of autonomy for the merchants when the interests of the state are not involved; and the existence of connections between the two groups, which were used on the relatively few occasions when contact was necessary."[21] Because commerce, particularly maritime trade, was perceived by the Mughals as not impinging upon imperial prerogatives, merchants were mostly left free to handle their affairs without officials' interference. Mughal disinterest in sea borne trade, according to Pearson, was due to the fact that Mughal power and authority was almost wholly derived from control of the land and its produce. Although Pearson's overall emphasis is on traders' autonomy, he does mention a number of cases where merchants worked in the Mughal revenue administration, and cites instances of Mughal indebtedness to merchants. He therefore qualifies his argument for a weak connection between state and trade by noting that "The merchants of Gujarat controlled an enormous money market, and this gave them, either together or as individuals, some political leverage."[22]

A much-debated article by Karen Leonard offers a contrast to Pearson's claim that merchants and rulers had very limited interactions. She argues that interdependence between bankers and rulers evolved to the degree that the Mughal administration could not function without the former's full participation. Traders and moneylenders depended upon

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 188.

[21] *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 123.

the political stability provided by the Mughals, while bankers' wealth and organization afforded them a "good bargaining position" vis-à-vis the Mughals.[23] Her claim is similar to Raychaudhuri's position, in that he also ascribes the moneylenders' leverage against the nobles to the former's capacity to pay bribes and shut down trade, but especially the nobles' large-scale spending, which led to their reliance upon moneylenders' loans and credit. However, she cites an additional factor linking the state to banking firms, by stressing that Mughal officials were critically dependent upon bankers for the routine aspects of fiscal administration and management. This included the production and sale of goods to the royal court, acquiring profitable contracts to build public structures, and dealing with jewels and the import of bullion into the empire. Most importantly, bankers helped manage the transfer of the immense amounts of land revenue from the provinces to the imperial center, which necessitated the use of specialized banking skills and mechanisms. In particular, the utilization by bankers of *hundis*, bills of exchange, provided a critical service in the imperial financial administration, and facilitated its efficient functioning.

But during the century 1650-1750, continues Leonard, several forces converged to cause large banking firms to divert "resources, both credit and trade, from the Mughals to other political powers in the Indian subcontinent [which] contributed to the downfall of empire."[24] Leonard remarks that the migration of banking firms out of Mughal cities was due in some degree to the Mughals' failure to protect trade and traders from military

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[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 127-131.

[23] "The 'Great Firm' Theory of the Decline of the Mughal Empire", *Comparative Studies in Sociey and History*, 21, 2 (1979), p. 416.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 399.

aggressors, such as the Maratha attacks on Surat beginning in the 1660's. She also emphasizes that there were positive opportunities to conduct trade and banking activities under regimes beyond Mughal control, which contributed to the bankers' decision to migrate. These factors indicate that, after 1650, "Mughals, in policy and practice, do not appear to have placed enough importance upon retaining the confidence of the great banking firms, and this was a critical error."[25] Implicit in this argument is the notion that banking firms worked closely with the empire when they perceived it to be in their interest to do so, but did not hesitate to dissolve these ties when better opportunities arose. Of the viewpoints discussed above, Leonard's view is in closest accord with Dale's claim that the Mughals had close ties to merchants and bankers (although for Leonard it is understood as a matter of convenience, not ideological commitment), but it significantly diverges from Dale's line of argument when she asserts that this connection frayed after 1650.

In a detailed critique of Leonard's thesis, J.F. Richards has written that, while seemingly plausible on the face of it, Leonard's argument cannot be substantiated on the basis of direct evidence from the seventeenth century.[26] Richards acknowledges that merchants and moneylenders played a significant role in the economy of Mughal India, as well as in the state administrations of the eighteenth century post-Mughal successor states. But as for the seventeenth century, Richards believes that banking firms' "services were limited and dispensable" within the imperial system.[27] Rather than rely on bankers, the

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 401, 416.

[26] " Mughal State Finance and the Premodern World Economy", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23 (1981): 285-308.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 291.

Mughals handled the revenue administration themselves. Richards notes that various commercial groups such as moneylenders and moneychangers, brokers, graindealers, and wealthy merchants certainly prospered and performed essential tasks for the market economy, but this did not translate in direct employment with the state. Richards argues that the Mughals were able to avoid dependence on bankers and merchants because "war plunder, tribute, and massive agrarian tax collections combined to generate for the empire resources with, save in truly exceptional years, far exceeded its expenditures."[28] In this view, traders had no real leverage against Mughal exploitation, and were at the mercy of the nobility's capriciousness.

It is notable that in the studies discussed above, whatever stance political-military elites are thought to have held toward the commercial economy, it is generally assumed that Mughal elites from Akbar through Aurangzeb's reign possessed a fairly uniform set of attitudes. This reflects the common predilection to view the entire edifice of the Mughal state as a static entity rather than a dynamic system undergoing periodic change.[29] Most imperial institutions have in this way been understood as having obtained their classic form under Akbar, undergoing modifications only in degree, but not fundamental function, throughout the entire seventeenth century. The mansabdari and jagirdari systems, the administrative and revenue collecting apparatus, and organization of the military retained, in

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 292.

[29] See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Mughal State - Structure or Process? Reflections on Recent Western Historiography", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. xxix (3), 1992, pp. 291-321; Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Mughal State*, p. 6.

this view, a consistent character until after Aurangzeb's reign.[30]

A recent essay by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam has called into question this monolithic portrait of the Mughal state, with the authors suggesting "that researchers simultaneously trace evolution over time, and examine variation over space".[31] One area, with particular relevance for the current study, where Alam and Subrahmanayam see transformation regards Mughal attitudes toward trade. They argue that there is a discernible shift towards support of and investment in trade by Mughal rulers and nobles in the decades of the mid-seventeenth century.[32] The authors write that banking networks in the course of the seventeenth century had to some degree merged with the Mughal revenue system, and they claim that *hundis* were more central to Mughal revenue collection than is often acknowledged.[33]

Subrahmanyam has elsewhere ascribed some of this change to the influx of Iranian nobles into India, who brought with them Iranian traditions which readily combined the practices of statecraft and commerce. He cites this tradition as evidence to counter what he

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[30] I.H. Qureshi goes so far as to see essential governmental continuity from the Delhi Sultanate through the Mughal period, *The Administration of the Mughal Empire* (Karachi, 1966); See e.g., Ibn Hasan, *The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire and its Practical Working up to the Year 1657* (New York [1936]); William Irvine, *The Army of the Indian Moghuls: its Organization and Administration* (London, 1903). This notion originates in Mughal histories themselves. E.g., in 1647, historian Lahori gives impression that the "core institutions created by Akbar" were little changed; cited in J.F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, The New Cambridge History of India, vol. I.5 (Cambridge, 1993), p. 147.

[31] Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Mughal State*, p. 6; see also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Mughal State - Structure or Process?"

[32] Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Mughal State*, pp. 25-30.

[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26. Alam and Subrahmanyam refer to a passage by J.F. Richards in his article "Mughal State Finance", wherein he claims that "most transfers of imperial funds" were not done through the use of *hundis*. One should note, however, that elsewhere Richards appears to acknowledge a high degree of imperial dependence on *hundis*. In his Introduction to *The Imperial Monetary System of Mughal India*, he writes that "imperial fiscal officers frequently (although not always) used *hundis* for the transfer of funds." p. 5.

sees as the dominant approach in early modern histories, wherein "*imarat* and *tijarat* (state building and trade, so to speak) are [seen as] two wholly distinct fields of activity."[34] Subrahmanyam instead asserts that "a clear case can be made that the early modern mind in Asia understood that trade did, in fact, have a legitimate place in society. Aside from explicit articulations (which are bound to be relatively rare), the actions of the Mughal *mansabdars* speak louder than words."[35] He describes a pattern of participation in trade by the nobility, particularly among men of Iranian origin, which reveals how state power was utilized to promote commerce. At the same time, this process fostered the commercialization of the state, with the merchant's skills, such as enumeration and accounting, becoming indispensable elements in government administration. Subrahmanyam claims that "no rigid ideological barrier existed in the minds of the Mughals (or of other rulers) where trade was concerned."[36] Subrahmanyam has further elaborated this argument for the interdependence of merchants and the Mughal state in a series of articles he has authored and co-authored.[37]

To recapitulate, then, Stephen Dale argues that the Mughals' ethnic traditions and ideological inheritance had combined with enlightened self-interest to give the empire a distinctly positive attitude towards trade, so that merchants were early on permanently

[34] "Iranians Abroad: Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation", p. 356.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 356-57.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 356.

[37] "The Mughal State - Structure or Process? Reflections on Recent Western Historiography" *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 29, 3 (1992); see also S. Subrahmanyam and C.A. Bayly, "Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 25, 4 (1988).

integrated into the Mughal system. In contrast, M. Athar Ali maintains that rulers consistently antagonized merchants, exploiting defenseless traders for immediate financial benefit. Raychaudhuri similarly contends that antagonism characterized the relations between the two groups. But he points out that merchants were not without significant power of their own to protect their interests, so that a mutually beneficial compromise emerged. Athar Ali, Raychaudhuri, and Richards' conclusions imply that the actions of the Mughals limited, but ultimately did not stall, economic growth. M.N. Pearson claims that, at least in Gujarat, the commercial economy and the Mughal state functioned largely autonomously of one another, although with a few exceptions. Karen Leonard implies that the Mughals maintained an attitude of indifference towards merchants and bankers. Despite this, the stable conditions created by the Mughal peace promoted an alliance between the state and bankers, but more turbulent conditions after 1650 caused the bankers to flee Mughal cities for better prospects. Finally, Subrahmanyam has produced the most sustained arguments portraying close and mutually beneficial relations between merchants and the state. In his argument, much of the Mughal involvement in trade is due specifically to the migration of Irani nobles in the mid-seventeenth century.

The types of argument and evidence adduced in the debate over Mughal-merchant relations can now be summarized and categorized as follows. Those who see a close and cooperative association between rulers and traders point to several distinct types of evidence. First, a not insignificant amount of revenue is said to have been collected by various taxes on trade and production. While small in comparison to the agrarian revenue, it is nonetheless seen as a large enough amount to provide incentive for Mughals to protect

and promote trade. Second, a close relationship is said to be indicated by the fact that Mughal officials and members of the royal household profited by direct participation, or through investment, in trade. Numerous instances of Mughal emperors, princes, and mansabdars' prosecution of maritime and overland trade, as well as collaborative ventures with private merchants, are cited as clear proof of Mughal appreciation of commerce. Third, the Mughal nobility periodically depended on loans and credit from bankers and traders, used for several purposes. For instance, the sudden onset of open hostilities in a princely succession struggle often compelled nobles to rapidly procure large amounts of cash, in order to mobilize an army for battle. To take another example, mansabdars were sometimes required to provide a security payment to the state in advance of receiving a new administrative posting. Credit was also commonly used toward purchases of luxury items, and for the costly upkeep of elite households. Fourth, the imperial fiscal administration is claimed to have been directly dependent on merchants' organizations and abilities, since the state system was deeply integrated into the commercial economy. Accounting skills, systems of money-lending and credit, and interregional networks for transferring wealth are here understood as central elements required to keep the imperial fiscal system functioning. Merchant groups of varied backgrounds - Iranis, Kayasths, Khatris, and others - were therefore closely integrated into the Mughal administration, and given posts at various levels of government. Finally, the more general proposition is often advanced that imperial Islamic ideology was innately favorable to commerce. Beginning with the Prophet Muhammad himself, Islamic teachings and practice are noted to consistently place a high value on the mercantile ethos.

Proponents of the counterargument, wherein the Mughals are seen as generally hostile to commercial activity, point to the frequent harassment and exploitation of merchants as the most convincing proof of their claim. Throughout the entire Mughal period, the nobility was quick to forcibly extract wealth from traders and moneylenders, and the latter's own documents evince a sense of insecurity vis-à-vis the state. The argument is further bolstered by reference to the lack of formal treaties and contracts which would have protected merchants' rights. It is also claimed that the Mughal revenue administration operated by and large independently of private systems of finance and money transfer, relying instead on the physical movement of cash. Finally, the Mughal system is seen as a continuation of that of the Delhi Sultanate in that the amount of taxes collected from commercial activity is regarded as miniscule compared to land revenue. Consequently, the state never moved beyond an ethos based in land and warrior-hood, and thus had no real incentive to protect and promote commerce.

The Mughal State: Contention, Change, and Centralization

It is striking that in this debate both sides are able to marshal a substantial amount of documentation for their respective conclusions. Well-documented instances of Mughal hostility are as much in evidence as elite cooperation with merchants. For Raychaudhuri, who takes this fact into account, this denotes the fundamental ambivalence of the Mughal attitude toward trade. Indeed, this would be the logical conclusion to draw if one accepts that the Mughal state represented a static structure over its lifespan. But if one is willing to consider that the state continued to evolve throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, an alternative, perhaps more adequate, explanation is possible. Furthermore, the

seemingly contradictory nature of the evidence would indicate that at any given moment there was in fact no unified Mughal policy at all.[38] It appears, then, that to the degree the debate to date has been over identification of "*the* Mughal position" vis-à-vis trade and traders, the question being posed has itself been inappropriate to the subject.

Following the line of enquiry opened by Alam and Subrahmanyam on the nature of the Mughal state, I will argue that rather than looking for a singular, consistent Mughal attitude, in this case toward trade, it would be more fruitful to begin by identifying what attitudes and practices predominated in specific times and places. I highlight two developments, specific to the seventeenth century, that had a great impact on the place of merchants and trade under the Mughals. The first of these, the expansion of the commercial economy under the Mughals, has long been understood as one of the era's distinguishing features. Yet within this framework of growth, the structure and aspirations of merchant groups have been only partially examined. The elements that *have* been analyzed pertain primarily to the internal functioning of trading and banking organizations. Hence numerous historians have documented the ethnic and caste background of prominent trading communities. Similarly, the development of sophisticated, long-distance networks of commodity exchange and money transfer have been carefully studied. Also, there exist many detailed examinations of the types and amounts of goods produced, the function of specific market locales, and the patterns of commercial exchange. What has been largely overlooked, though, are the ways in which the immense commercial growth attendant upon

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[38] I discuss this idea further in Chapter One, based on Andre Wink's notion of *fitna*, in his *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge, 1986).

the Mughal Peace led to greatly increased social and political aspirations of participants in this expansion at various social levels. I will argue that the sheer magnitude of commercial expansion - and the accumulation of wealth and power that accompanied it - created new expectations among wealthy merchants, middling traders and shopkeepers, as well as commodity-producing artisans. Concerning merchants, foremost among their desires was, at the minimum, increased protection against exploitation by state officials, if not direct access to political power. Alongside this, one would expect to see an attempt to gain higher social status for all of the groups participant in commercial expansion. This study argues that such ambitions did indeed surface, representing a significant transformation of the economic realm with which the Mughal state had to contend.

The spread of a market economy presented a challenge to Mughal control in other ways as well. At a socio-economic level beneath that of the merchants, peasants were lured away from villages to cities in significant enough numbers to draw the attention of Mughal emperors.[39] The economic opportunities available in urban centers were a strong draw in the seventeenth century, and brought many agricultural producers into the commercial system, producing commodities for the market.[40] This migration conflicted with the Mughals' oft-stated desire to keep peasants on the land, at the productive agrarian base of the imperial revenue system. Certainly, some from among the growing class of artisans worked for the Mughals, in imperial "factories" known as *karkhanas*, producing for nobles

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[39] Satish Chandra, "Some Aspects of the Growth of a Money Economy", p. 158.

[40] Gavin Hambly, "Towns and Cities", *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, esp. pp. 441, 444.

directly, and hence not crafting commodities for the market.[41] But the majority of urban artisans sold their goods on the open market, either directly or through the services of an intermediary. The mid-seventeenth century changes observable in Mughal attitudes toward trade thus were in large measure a response to the changing place in society of merchants, moneylenders, and artisans. The form taken by the commercial world's burgeoning aspirations will be discussed below.

The second development in the seventeenth century affecting the state's approach to the commercial economy was the Mughals' intensification of their efforts toward administrative centralization. Studies of the process of centralization have focused upon the state's attempts to place centrally appointed officials throughout the Mughal territories. This included the appointment of greater numbers of imperial officials in executive, legal, and fiscal posts in the empire's provinces.[42] Consolidation of Mughal power has also been examined through its establishment of more direct links with and control over intermediary power holders, such as regional rajas and zamindars.[43] But as mentioned above, in attempting to consolidate and concentrate their power, the Mughals were also forced to come to terms with the social groups associated with trade and production which had obtained a substantially strengthened position in the course of the seventeenth century. The increase in merchants' wealth and power presented a problem for the Mughals, because its

[41] Habib, "Potentialities for Capitalistic Development", pp. 221-22.

[42] For a description of the normative Mughal point of view these posts , see M.P. Singh, *Town, Market, Mint and Port in the Mughal Empire, 1556-1707* (Delhi, 1985).

[43] See e.g., S. Nurul Hasan, "Zamindars under the Mughals" in R. Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*; Norman Ziegler, "Some Notes on Rajput Loyalties During the Mughal Period", in J.F. Richards (ed.), *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison, 1969).

origins lie beyond state control in two ways. First, long-distance trade involved commercial networks that necessarily operated in territories beyond the Mughal dominions, with some merchants retaining investments in land rights in other empires.[44] While this did not make merchants necessarily disloyal subjects, it did raise questions as to the extent of their commitment to the Mughal empire. Second, and more importantly, legitimate power and social mobility, from the Mughal point of view, were obtained through military service and personal fealty to the emperor. Rewards consisted of increased imperial rank and expanded shares in agricultural revenue rights. In the Mughal system, the emperor was the only legitimate source of authority, power, and status.[45] Wealth gained from participation in the market economy was usually held, in the prevailing and explicit view of the rulers, to be an inherently dishonorable source of power.[46] Yet, as I will discuss below, with the expansion of the commercial economy, Mughal actions, if not ideology, seem to have undergone modification by the mid-seventeenth century, beginning with the reign of Shah Jahan.[47]

Faced with a group whose growing power was generated outside of the legitimizing authority of the imperial system, the Mughals were restricted in choosing possible responses. The dominant state ethos based in land-control and, especially, military valor in service of the emperor always mitigated against direct, acknowledged incorporation of non-

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[44] Subrahmanyam, "Iranians Abroad."

[45] J.F. Richards, "The Formation of Imperial Authority Under Akbar and Jahangir",in J.F. Richards (ed.), *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison, 1981).

[46] "India and the Indian Ocean in the Sixteenth Century", in Ashin Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson (eds.), *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800* (Calcutta, 1987), p. 79.

[47] Satish Chandra, "The Growth of a Money Economy", p. 158-60; Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Mughal State*, pp. 28-30.

warrior merchants into the imperial system. The strength and depth of commitment to this ethos meant that a reformulation of state ideology to give a place of increased honor and higher status to merchants was out of the question. Nonetheless, the state could still choose between attempting to increase its control of the commercial economy, or taking action to contain its expansion. In fact, I will argue, both of these goals were pursued in tandem. The numerous instances of Mughal extortion, discussed above, did serve as a constraint and a check on merchant activity. Another strategy for controlling trade was to participate directly in it, rather than leaving it to merchant groups. As noted above, Mughal investments in sea and land trade in the seventeenth century have often been seen as an indication of their appreciation of the financial benefits to be had from commerce. It is often further argued that profits thus obtained were then squandered on luxury goods. But if the immense wealth available from trade is also seen as a potential source of power, which it certainly was, Mughal participation can be seen as a means to deprive other social groups of this resource. In this regard, we can also reconsider the growing tendency among Mughals to create monopolies in a wide range of goods.[48] The significance of these monopolies is usually seen in their destructive impact on the market system. However, such attempts to corner the market should also be seen as efforts to place control of the commercial economy firmly in the hands of the state, and hence away from independent merchants. Notably, it appears that it is only beginning with the reign of Shah Jahan (r. 1627-1658) that monarchs, members of the royal family, and nobles are known to have instituted commercial monopolies. Furthermore, the attempts by nobles at monopoly were undertaken specifically by provincial

[48] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, p. 183; Satish Chandra, "Commercial Activities of the Mughal Emperors", pp. 150-51, 153.

governors, such as Wazir Khan in Lahore, and Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan in Bengal.[49] Since the office of the governor in the seventeenth century Mughal system became a key agent of central imperial control,[50] these efforts can be seen as part of the centralization process.

Religion, Market, and State

The new challenges that commercialization posed to the state, then, called for equally novel responses. Yet, even though the Mughal state was not a static monolith, its approach to such an important group as merchants, and to the expansion of the market economy generally, was neither haphazard, nor left entirely to the whims of individual nobles. Some of the more visible responses to growing merchant wealth and power have been outlined above. But in order to obtain a more encompassing picture of Mughal actions, it will be necessary to investigate the nature of the spheres in which the state interacted with traders and artisans. This entails a consideration of the types of activity and belief associated with "politics" and the "economy," as these domains are conventionally understood.

It is a central contention of this study that these two conspicuous developments of the seventeenth century, commercialization and state centralization, were negotiated in a realm where economic and political concerns overlapped with religious phenomena. My approach has parallels with the theory and method discussed by Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his introduction to the collected essays in *Merchants, Markets and the State in Early Modern*

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[49] Satish Chandra, "Commercial Activities of the Mughal Emperors", p. 153.

[50] Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, p. 57.

India. There he argues that an artificial and distorting distinction is made by studies of Mughal India which analyze the "political" and "economic" as autonomously functioning domains.[51] He suggests that a more productive approach would be to study the "political economy," that is, to account for the interaction between the two spheres. Here Subrahmanyam is concerned with understanding how the early modern Indian economy is "embedded in society," and particularly with how markets relate to state systems.[52] Consequently, he looks to the reciprocal impact between economy and politics, since politics is seen as the primary mode for the expression of state power. But when considering the history of the market in India, I would argue that there are good reasons for extending the field of analysis beyond economy (here denoting primarily commodity exchange) and politics (as the struggle over state power as well as relations between classes), to include the realm of culture, specifically religion. In rejecting the idea that economy, politics, and religion constitute wholly autonomous domains, each with its own internal laws and logic, it is not, of course, necessary or desirable to therefore abandon these notions altogether, as representative of actual and conceptual entities. Rather, the point is to enable one to construct a picture that more accurately reflects the ways in which each of these "fields" of thought and action develops in interaction with one another, as well as within a larger social system.[53]

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[51] "Introduction", Sanjay Subrahmanyam (ed.), *Merchants, Markets and the State in Early Modern India.*

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[53] I use the concept of "field" is in the sense developed by Pierre Bourdieu, see especially his critique of "economism"; *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), esp. chs. 1-3.

A central case in point concerns the predisposition of scholars to examine aspects of the economy of Mughal India in isolation from other social forces. The notion of the "market", as both the physical locus and abstract concept of the exchange of goods and money, is usually understood to represent an extra-symbolic entity existing apart from, or even in opposition to, "culture". Thus the commonplace Mughal disdain for trade and traders is ascribed to the bias of the rulers' ethos toward land and military service, and against profit gained in the market. The market itself, like the land, is implicitly understood as value neutral, as a phenomenon operating according to purely rational and mechanical principles. Typical in this regard is K.N. Chaudhuri's study of trade in Mughal India.[54] Chaudhuri describes the relevance of Karl Polanyi's thought for his own work, noting that Polanyi "made a fundamental distinction between trade which was conducted through economic calculations and that which was an expression of political or social will". The former was "regulated by prices, and these in turn were the function of the market. But institutional trading was independent of such a market. The chief, or the king who acted for the community, acquired the goods through a command system and distributed them according to customary practices. The whole process of exchange included considerable ceremonial and ritualistic elements. Out of these ideas came Polanyi's well-known concept of market-less trading. It is clear that the long-distance commerce of Mughal India....falls in the category of market trading." In Chaudhuri's view, the price-making market, imperfect though it may have been, was nevertheless the central mechanism guiding Mughal era trade, and moved in accordance with "economic calculations" performed outside of conditions

[54] "Markets and Traders in India during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", K.N. Chaudhuri and Clive J. Dewey (eds.), *Economy and Society: Essays in Indian Economic and Social History*(New York: 1979).

dictated by "political or social will."

In the chapters ahead, I intend to demonstrate that merchant and artisan attitudes toward the market reveal that in Mughal India, commodity production and market exchange did not take place independent of such conditions. My point is not to reverse Chaudhuri's argument in order to demonstrate that early modern Indian trade was uniformly dictated by "non-economic" forces. Rather, I believe that the application of the mutually exclusive categories of "market" and "market-less" trade is misleadingly dichotomous. Rational economic calculation in this sense can be shown to operate in a market system that was thoroughly imbricated with political, cultural and social forces. To this end I will argue that the development of the market in the Mughal period was inextricably bound up with religious concepts and practices. I will discuss the function of holy places, religious pilgrimage and festivals, and organized religious movements in the development of physical loci for market exchange. I will also examine the role of religious beliefs and teachings in the expansion and legitimation of an abstract "market mentality". In this regard, devotional literature represents a major repository of merchants' and artisans' attitudes toward commodity production and trade, reflected in the recurrent use of terms and concepts associated with the market. In this capacity, devotional literature presents a dramatic antithesis to the oft-noted indifference and contempt toward trade and its associated values displayed in the Mughal chronicles. For example, devotional writings emphasize the merchant's dedication to honesty and trustworthiness, as bedrock values which make commercial relations possible at all. Staple bhakti metaphors compare the worship of God to acts of buying and selling, and the benefits of genuine devotion are likened to profit and

capital accumulation. References to the divine are similarly invoked in relation to artisanal production, wherein an ethic of hard work and discipline are a mark spiritual progress.

The examination of the link specifically between devotional religion and political economy, a primary focus of the present study, is not without precedent in South Asian historiography. Max Weber's study of the role of bhakti movements in giving expression to the "middle class burgher" element of Indian society is in many ways an insightful interpretation, although now of course outdated in many of its assumptions.[55] The reflection of economic and technological progress in medieval bhakti religiosity has also been carefully studied in numerous writings. There is a common tendency, however, to portray bhakti as an ideological epiphenomenon, merely echoing the changes in the ostensibly more fundamental "base" of material (i.e., economic) reality.[56] Several recent works have revealed the inadequacy of such a base-superstructure model, through pioneering explorations of the multifaceted and complex ties between bhakti, the market economy, and state-formation.[57] In such works, the interplay of cultural, economic, and political forces is seen as multi-directional and historically contingent, belying any attempt to grant one domain causal primacy. My study adopts a similar theoretical and methodological

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[55] See Chapter Two *infra.*

[56] Irfan Habib, "The Historical Background of the Popular Monotheistic Movement"; Harbans Mukhia, "The Ideology of the Bhakti Movement: The Case of Dadu Dayal" ; Eugenia Vanina, *Ideas and Society in India from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries.*

[57] See Norbert Peabody, "Cents, Sense, Census: Human Inventories in Late Precolonial and Early Colonial India", *Comparative Studies in Sociey and History*, (2001); Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India, 300 B.C. to A.D. 1300* (Oxford, 1996); Sunita Puri, *Advent of Sikh Religion: A Socio-Political Perspective* (New Delhi, 1993); Velchuru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamil Nadu* (Oxford, 1992); David N. Lorenzen, *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action* (Albany, 1995); Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars.*

viewpoint, applied to popular socio-religious movements, as well as to state religious policy.

Studies based on this bhakti literature have greatly added to our knowledge of religious, theological, mystical and literary issues in early modern India. But few scholars have ventured to analyze the significance of this phenomenon for political and economic history. The reason for this, I will argue, is to be found in the common assumption, in studies whose main subject is devotional religion, that such movements are by definition separate from, if not opposed to, both political and economic interests as such. Leaders of such movements are in this way understood to attain spiritual stature precisely to the degree to which they renounce political power and material gain. Certainly, taken at face value, writings by devotional leaders and their followers reinforce this impression. Devotional poetry and hagiographies are replete with stories of heroic renunciants who are tempted by offers of wealth and power from kings and nobles, only to reject these as impediments to spiritual purity and progress. I will argue, however, that such claims of renunciation in fact represent a central technique by which devotional leaders were able to enhance their social prestige at a time when competition for people's loyalties was intense and open-ended. In particular, the wealth and aspirations among evolving socio-economic groups whose loyalties were not beholden either to traditional political elites, or to entrenched religious institutions, particularly those of Brahmanism, were channeled to support devotional leaders. Wealthy and smaller merchants, along with artisanal groups, found devotional figures to be individuals whose autonomy from caste-bound social hierarchies (itself an effect of renunciation), and direct state control, made them ideal figures towards whom loyalties could be directed.

There are other reasons, as well, to consider the renunciation of devotional leaders to be precisely the trait which attracted devotees from among traders and artisans. On one level, Indian devotional movements possess features which are common to religious renunciants generally, in that holy men and women are often praised for embodying the unrealized values held by more typical members of society. This is seen, for example, in Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell's study of medieval Christian saints and their devotees, wherein it is observed that the saints' followers "themselves sought profit but conceded that poverty was a higher goal. They pursued worldly honors but acknowledged that humility was more pleasing to God....a society's heroes reflect, through antithesis and projection, its real condition and its longings."[58] The very rejection of the "worldly" goals of wealth and status contributes to renunciants' standing among the lay people.

In a more historically specific sense, too, bhakti leaders helped merchants and artisans cope with the social challenges they faced in a situation where formal state ideology (an ethos based in land and martial qualities) and a powerful social system (caste) denigrated mercantile values. Here, an informative comparison can be made with the role of the Franciscan and Dominican friars' movement of voluntary poverty in helping to justify commerce and moneylending, as these expanded in medieval Christian cities, depicted in Lester K. Little's insightful study, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*. Little describes how the growth of urban occupations related to the profit economy was attended by renunciant movements, which both mirrored and inverted the values such occupations held. He describes this process as one in which "the friars confronted the chief

[58] Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: 1982), p. 6.

problem of the new society, namely money-making. In the first place, they rejected money-making for themselves, turning instead to the recently matured ideal of voluntary poverty. Secondly, however, they persisted in the linguistic and formal mode of the money-makers, while avoiding the spiritually harmful aspects of such people's work. And thirdly, having themselves demonstrated part of the way, they provided for the leaders of urban society a revised moral theology that approved of money-making in certain, carefully defined circumstances. The friars' spirituality was both determined by, and a determining factor within, the new urban society."[59]

Apart from the fact that voluntary poverty was an ancient tradition among Indian renunciants, this description could quite accurately be applied to the teachings of bhakta leaders of the Mughal period, as will be substantiated in subsequent chapters.[60] But here it is equally important to consider the differences between the circumstances facing Christian friars and that of bhakta leaders. As is clear from the discussion above, Mughal power was an inescapable presence for the trading population. The Mughals both made possible the market economy, and, at least by the mid-seventeenth century, tried to contain its unchecked expansion. Unlike the friars' movements, bhakti movements were thus compelled to come to terms with a strong, centralizing state, one with a distinct, official religious ideology, based in Islam. This fact had major implications for the efforts by Indian devotional leaders to establish and maintain a modus vivendi with the Mughals, a subject to which I now turn.

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[59] Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 1978), pp. 201-02.

[60] The patterns that I analyze concerning the link between bhakti, an emergent mercantile class, and state-formation in Mughal north India have interesting parallels in late-sixteenth century South India kingdoms. See Rao, et. al., *Symbols of Substance*, esp. Chapter III.

A common, even defining feature of many bhakti traditions was their willingness to merge Islamic teachings with a variety of "Hindu" beliefs and practices.[61] Thus many of the bhakti traditions that I examine in the chapters ahead, including the movements of the Sikhs, Dadu Dayal, Mahamat Prannath, among others, are notable for their espousal of Islamic themes. Religious figures in India absorbed Islamic traditions as these emanated from diverse sources. By the sixteenth century, Islam had been widely diffused throughout the Indian subcontinent, and Islamic ideas, forms of worship, and architecture were a familiar presence in both town and country.[62] Islam was represented by a variety of social groups and classes, including, for example, merchants and artisans, peasants, and a great number of itinerant and sedentary holy men, the Sufis. But the presence of an Islamic regime based in Delhi from the early 13th century on also meant that in India, for many people, Islam, particularly in its more orthodox form, was closely associated with the state.[63] For this reason, the religious eclecticism of the Mughal emperor Akbar, which represented a contrast with Muslim emperors both before and after him, has been a continual subject of intense interest, from the time of his reign onwards. In modern scholarship, Akbar's eclectic religious policy has commonly been seen as simply the result of an inquisitive spirit, operating apart from political concerns. Others have explained it as a quite rational response

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[61] The accuracy of using the terms "Hindu" and "Hinduism" to refer to a variety of quite distinct pre-colonial Indian religious traditions - such as Vaishnavism, Saivism, Saktism, and so on - is hotly contested. I use the term here - although with caution, hence the quotation marks - as a convenient shorthand, without imbuing it with any specific explanatory capacity. For a recent inventory of the debate, see David Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?", *Comparative Studies in Sociey and History*, (1999).

[62] See Andre Wink, *Al Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vols. I and II.

[63] For a discussion of the nature of the Delhi Sultanate's Islamic ideology, see Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History*, esp. ch. 14; see also Wink, *Al Hind*, vol. II.

to the quandary faced by an Islamic regime ruling over a primarily non-Muslim population. In particular, the fact that Akbar established a critical alliance with dominant Hindu Rajput warrior clans made it imperative to adopt a tolerant, inclusive imperial ideology. In contrast, Akbar's great-grandson Aurangzeb's resort to an exclusivist, orthodox Sunni Islam has proven more difficult for historians to explain as a rational policy initiative. Indeed, attempts to explain the reasons for Aurangzeb's decisions often portray the emperor's behavior as irrational, based in his personal religious zealotry, which blinded him to the destructive consequences of his policy for imperial unity. Some writers have pointed to Islam itself, depicting a religion whose inner-logic inevitably drove the Mughal regime toward a more stringent orthodoxy. Other historians, looking for structural causes of the emperor's religious policy, describe Aurangzeb's actions as desperate and cynical attempts to use religious ideology to induce solidarity among a increasingly factionalized Muslim elite.

It is one aim of this study to explain elements of imperial religious policy from Akbar to Aurangzeb's reign as representing a consistently "rational" response to the changing circumstances facing the empire. Specifically, I propose that imperial policy needs to be seen within the context of the major developments outlined above, commercialization and centralization. Famously, Akbar welcomed representatives of many religious traditions - bhakta leaders, Jain monks, Sufis, Brahmans, Jesuit priests, and others - into his court. The meaning of this particular practice has conventionally been confined to the realm of religion, as providing evidence of Akbar's liberalism, open-mindedness, and spiritual and intellectual curiosity. But the connections between many of these religious

figures and particular trading communities points to an additional function performed by Akbar's policy. I argue that certain of these religious figures represented the interests of merchants and artisans, and in this capacity exerted considerable influence at the Mughal court. Scholars have long argued that merchants did not acquire protection from the state because in Mughal India there was no equivalent of the official contract between traders and the state common in medieval European cities. But I will argue that the perennial presence at the imperial court of leaders of religious groups ensured that merchant groups were provided protection by state officials, and gave the merchants a voice in the development of trade and tax policies.

Under Akbar, increasingly close links developed between merchant communities and the Mughal state. As mentioned above, evidence of these links is hard to come by if one looks to Mughal court chronicles, with their frequent disdain for commerce-related occupations. But religious groups closely associated with merchant and artisan communities stressed the importance of their intimate ties with the royal court. This is apparent in documents such as religious biographies and devotional poetry, which, I argue, provide a rich, but largely untapped, source of information concerning state-merchant relations. A number of Indian hagiographies go to great lengths to describe a saint's interaction with Mughal emperors at court. In this regard, Akbar appears to be a decisive figure, as numerous traditions retained records of the welcome given by this emperor in particular to their religious leaders. Of course, one needs to keep in mind that the conventions of hagiographical literature mean that such interactions are presented in an idealized and stereotyped fashion, and in many aspects are not to be taken literally. Nonetheless, with the

use of other sources, including Mughal court chronicles, we can corroborate certain facts about the relations between religious figures and the court. All of these issues will be explored more fully in Chapter Two.

In this context, I will also analyze Aurangzeb's well-known religious policies, arguing that they represented part of his efforts to extend and deepen centralized imperial control over Mughal territory and subjects. By a close examination of the context and impact of his edicts concerning religious matters - orders for temple destruction, prohibitions on certain religious fairs and pilgrimages, taxing Hindu merchants, the imposition of the jiziya tax, the elimination of Hindu influences at his court, among others - I will demonstrate that the emperor was attempting through his orders to suppress the growing threat to Mughal sovereignty that the market and its proponents represented. It will be my aim to show that one effect of Aurangzeb's edicts was to suppress the attempts by commercial groups to establish and expand markets and extend commercialization. The emperor's policies also had the effect of removing devotional leaders from the court, thereby weakening ties between the Mughal and merchant communities. One outcome of this collision between the Mughal state and the juggernaut of commercial trade was the reorientation of trade and banking networks, and devotional movements, towards regional political establishments.

My argument, therefore, lends support to Karen Leonard's claim that Mughal-banker relations were fundamentally transformed beginning in the mid-seventeenth century. But Leonard's essay itself begs an important question: given the apparently critical dependence of the Mughals upon banking firms, why would state officials so signally fail to attend to the latter's interests and concerns? A similar question arises when one considers that even those

scholars who argue that the Mughal aristocracy was closely integrated with networks of merchants and moneylenders have not failed to note that official Mughal ideology on the whole had a strongly negative view of trade.[64] It is possible, of course, to see this as merely representing a gap between imperial rhetoric on the one hand, and the real economic situation dictated by administrative necessity on the other. With this answer, however, one is still left without an adequate way of understanding just how did the Mughals, in the absence of a coherently articulated policy, ever manage to effectively incorporate merchants into the imperial system in the first place. Because merchants, unlike warriors, were never formally integrated into the administrative hierarchy, their position would in fact seem to be highly precarious, yet simultaneously an integral part of the revenue administration. This study addresses this seeming paradox by arguing that state-merchant interaction was not simply a relationship born of mutual convenience, left unacknowledged and unsystematized by traders and Mughals. Rather, by examining the role that devotional movements played in advancing the interests of traders, I argue that religious organizations provided a connection between traders and the state that, until Aurangzeb's reign, was reliable, while not directly confronting official Mughal ideology.

In Richards critique of Karen Leonard's "Great Firm Theory of Decline", discussed above, the author concludes his essay by asking: "What then of imperial decline? Here I can suggest that we must look first to the vital authoritative relationships which framed the

[64] Stephen Dale represents an exception. But Dale's evidence for positive assessments of trade in official Mughal writings is limited to texts from Akbar's reign and a text from the eighteenth century. J.C. Heesterman's comment is more typical of those who see close Mughal-merchant relations: "Although the sources have little but disparaging remarks to offer on the class of merchants and moneylenders, it seems safe to infer that they actually were the pivot of the imperial enterprise.", "Was There an Indian Reaction?", p. 39. See also S. Subrahmanyam, "Intra Asian", p. 357. For scholars who assert that the Mughals were always hostile to trade, this aspect of imperial ideology is, of course, seen as evidence for backing their claim.

empire: the relationship of the emperor to a cohesive nobility or political elite, the relationship of a rural aristocracy to the emperor and his representatives, and the relationship of the peasantry to the local aristocracy. The dual forces of intrusive administrative consolidation on the one hand, and intrusive commercialization on the other, must have caused qualitative changes in these relationships. Enhanced efficiency and capacity in both state and market do not necessarily strengthen or guarantee stability."[65] While not denying the importance of these relationships for maintenance of the empire, the present study suggests that the main beneficiaries of "intrusive commercialization" namely, merchants, moneylenders, and artisans, represented a new social force in the empire, whose aspirations emerged as a serious challenge to the traditional forms of imperial authority.

[65] "Mughal State Finance", p. 308.

CHAPTER ONE

Mughal State-Formation and the Market Economy

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the impact of Mughal state-formation on the development of a market economy, focusing on relations between rulers and traders, the imperial fiscal system, revenue demand, and government expenditure. The Mughal empire's wealth was legendary, and the riches amassed and displayed by successive emperors never failed to impress foreign travelers and merchants, who favorably compared the Mughals' opulence to that of contemporary European rulers. Because the empire's wealth was based on an agrarian economic base, much of the administrative machinery was dedicated to the protection and expansion of cultivation, accurate assessment of production levels, and the efficient extraction and reallocation of the agricultural surplus. This is reflected in many of the surviving documents produced by imperial officials, with the agrarian system and Mughal fiscal policy thus representing a traditional central focus for historians of the period. In contrast to the agrarian economy, the size and significance of the market system, and its position vis-à-vis the state, is less well understood, reflecting the scarcity of sources on the topic produced by the Mughals as well as by indigenous merchant groups. Records produced by the European trading companies have to some degree compensated for this paucity of relevant sources, and I therefore make some use of these in this chapter, although these naturally tell us less than we would like to know about Indian traders and producers. Another problem which besets many studies of the precolonial market arises from the

tendency to read back into the earlier time economic developments of the colonial period. A better understanding, I believe, can be derived from an examination of the extant sources within an analytical framework which examines the Indian market as it actually developed during the Mughal period, rather than as an inherently flawed system . Most importantly, this requires conceiving of the market as operating in close interaction with the state, in ways that I detail below.

In the first section below I argue against the long-standing claim that views the commercial economy of the Mughal period as having been seriously underdeveloped due to unproductive expenditure by Mughal royalty and nobility. At the same time, I also dispute the more recent view that acknowledges India's thriving premodern market economy, but disputes the importance of Mughal demand and expenditure in fostering commercial growth. A reassessment of Mughal spending and consumption that focuses on the political and cultural context of imperial practices will reveal the state's role as a major spur to commercial economic expansion. Simultaneously, though, I argue that the state sought to keep the expanding market in a subordinate position within the imperial administrative hierarchy. This analysis will consequently examine both the possibilities and limits for market expansion prior to India's colonization. While on the surface Mughal rulers' attitude toward trade and traders appeared ambivalent, closer examination reveals that as a general rule the Mughals extended their support for trade. The present chapter will in this regard provide an account of the socio-political setting which both profoundly shaped and was impacted by devotional movements whose history was closely intertwined with the growth of the market economy that are the

subject of the following chapters.

Recent studies have called into question previously accepted estimates of the extent of the Mughal rulers' effective political control over regional territories, and, as a corollary, their ability to draw off a high percentage of surplus production through taxation. While these new findings have been rejected by the standard-bearers of the traditional view, collectively known as the "Aligarh school" of Mughal historiography, the idea that the Mughals exercised almost total political control across North India, in a manner akin to a fully modern state, is now viewed by many scholars as untenable. Similarly, the claim that imperial revenue demand extracted almost the entire agrarian surplus from the countryside, representing somewhere between one-third and one-half of total production, has been seriously called into question. The limitations of primary sources regarding precise measures of political control and revenue income mean that historians will never have an exact accounting on these issues, although it is becoming clearer that earlier studies, in part because of a heavy reliance on Mughal self-representations in the Persian-language documentation, did indeed overestimate the power of the Mughal state. Careful regional studies have proved particularly important in the reassessment of the limits of the empire's control and its ability to extract wealth from the provinces and transfer it to imperial centers of power.

If the Mughal empire, then, was not as all-powerful as was once thought, neither should the state be considered a mere paper tiger. This is not to suggest that a proper assessment need only locate precisely where Mughal power lay at some point between the two extremes. Rather, what is required is a reevaluation of the very nature of the

Mughal state and its means of exerting control over its subjects, in other words, the nature of its sovereignty. This can be viewed in both its political and economic aspects, although as we will see in the course of this and subsequent chapters, the assumption that these two spheres represented fundamentally autonomous and stable categories itself needs to be altered. In the examination of the Mughal state that follows, I focus my enquiry on those elements which can directly or indirectly shed light on the character of the market economy.

The Mughal fiscal system and the market economy

The Mughal state's revenue demand and expenditure had a substantial impact on all levels of Indian economic life, although the degree and nature of this impact specifically upon the development of South Asia's commercial economy is controversial.[1] The groundwork for the Timurid Mughal empire was laid by the Central Asian Turks Babur (r. 1526-30) and Humayun (r. 1530-40, 1554-56) with their military conquest of Northern India, but it was the Afghan ruler Sher Shah Sur (r. 1540-54) who initiated and developed many important elements of the region's economic infrastructure.[2] Sher Shah's production of coinage, along with his construction of an extensive network of roads, bridges, wells, and waystations greatly facilitated inter-

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[1] Shireen Moosvi has produced one of the most detailed analyses of the Indian economy under the Mughals in her book *The Economy of the Mughal Empire, c. 1595: A Statistical Study* (Delhi, 1987). Her study is based primarily on the data contained in the *Ain-i Akbari*, supplemented with other sources including accounts by European merchants and travelers, and numismatic evidence. Her overall approach, however, is flawed by the repeated attempt to derive overly precise statistical figures based on the largely uncorroborated and incomplete data provided in the *Ain-i Akbari*. Even so, her work does present a useful discussion on the more narrow topic of the fiscal operation of the imperial establishment and aristocratic households, providing rough approximations of the income and spending of the Mughals , if not the exact figures claimed by the author.

[2] I. H. Siddiqi, *History of Sher Shah Sur* (Aligarh, 1971).

regional commerce. Subsequent rulers continued to develop this infrastructure, but several original features of imperial rule devised by the emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) distinguished his administrative policy generally, and his economic policy specifically from the others. During and after his successful military conquest of territories from Gujarat in the west to Bengal in the east in the 1570s, Akbar employed a series of novel political, economic, and cultural strategies designed to integrate powerful rulers and communities into the imperial system. With these efforts the Mughal empire embarked upon a period of relative peace, stability and prosperity which was to last for over a century.

The empire's financial success was enabled by the fact that Akbar initiated an effort much more extensive than any previously undertaken to institute a standardized system of imperial currency throughout North India, with state-controlled minting factories for gold, silver and copper coins being strategically established in a number of Mughal cities.[3] The implementation of a relatively standardized agrarian revenue system brought disparate regions into a shared "cash-nexus," greatly intensifying economic exchange.[4] The empire's core agrarian territories were placed under *zabt*, the system of revenue assessment and collection carried out according to imperial regulation, while outlying territories were less regularly assessed, and were periodically subject to plundering raids. The government's requirement that taxes be paid in cash

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[3] The most important essays on this subject have been collected into a volume edited by John F. Richards, *The Imperial Monetary System of Mughal India* (Oxford, 1987). See esp. John S. Deyell, "The Development of Akbar's Currency System and Monetary Integration of the Conquered Kingdoms", pp. 13-67; Marie H. Martin, "The Reforms of the Sixteenth Century and Akbar's Administration: Metrological and Monetary Considerations", pp. 68-99.

[4] Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Bombay, 1963).

compelled cultivators to sell their annual harvest to merchants, while the payment of cash salaries to officials, soldiers and bureaucrats disseminated Mughal coins widely throughout Indian society, familiarizing people high and low with the workings of money while integrating the regions of North India into a common economic system.[5]

By any measure the economy of Mughal India at the turn of the seventeenth century was enormous and expanding. Akbar's administrative and economic initiatives established a solid framework that served the empire well, and provided a structure which endured until the later seventeenth century, with his successors wisely continuing most of his imperial policies and practices. While the Mughals undeniably facilitated this growth, a separate question remains, namely, to what degree did Mughal policy strengthen the *commercial* economy? What role did the Mughal state and its fiscal system directly play in either encouraging or retarding this growth? And what was the relationship between the state and representatives of the market economy, *viz.*, traders and producers?

The seventeenth century saw a steady increase in the demand for manufactured items and in the volume of local, inter-regional and long-distance trade. By the time of Shah Jahan's reign, the money economy had penetrated society to the point that, as famously quipped by the French traveler Tavernier, "A village must be very small if it has not a money-changer, whom they call a *shroff*".[6] In addition to domestic demand,

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[5] For a discussion of the social impact of monetization, see Frank Perlin, "Money Use in Late Pre-Colonial India and the International Trade in Currency Media", in Richards, ed., *Imperial Monetary System*.

[6] Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, 1640-67, tr. V. Ball, Vol. I, p. 28.

European traders catered to an expanding foreign demand for Indian products, beginning with the appearance of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and expanding exponentially with the participation of the Dutch, French and English companies in the seventeenth century.[7] This trade further facilitated commercialization by providing the economy with the Europeans' import of a steady supply of precious metals of which India itself produced little. Finally, this period witnessed a flourishing overland trade with Central and West Asia.[8]

The Mughals' successful efforts to develop a stable and dependable currency, along with the establishment of safe and well-provisioned roads were no doubt intended to meet administrative and military needs. The Mughals' construction and maintenance of major thoroughfares allowed large armies to move quickly across long distances, and enabled the frequent movement of Timurid emperors and their massive entourages accustomed to a peripatetic government. But these and other projects also had a clearly beneficial impact on the commercial economy. Major east-west routes in North India connected the coastal ports of Gujarat and Bengal to Agra and Delhi, while another axis connected the central Mughal lands to trade centers in the north, including Multan and Lahore, and thence onward to Central and West Asia, and to the Deccan in the south. All of the major routes connected up with smaller tributary roads leading into more remote regions, giving towns and villages access to the larger market areas. The Mughals' efforts to line the arterial roadways with caravansaries is evidence of the

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[7] See Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. II, 5 (Cambridge, 1998).

[8] Muzaffar Alam, "Trade, State Policy and Regional Change: Aspects of Mughal-Uzbek Commercial

empire's active interest in facilitating inter-regional trade. The Italian traveler and adventurer Niccolao Manucci observed that "For the use of wayfarers there are throughout the realms of the Mogul on every route many [caravansaries]", which could usually accommodate 800-1,000 or more travelers along with their goods and animals. The Mughals took great care to protect the property of merchants who stayed at the inns and prosecuted thieves there, while entrance was forbidden to soldiers.[9] Additionally, the inns themselves served as a marketplace for small-scale traders, who dealt in cloth, animal fodder, and other lower-end items and services.[10] Finally, the available evidence would indicate that cities which served as administrative centers for the Mughals, especially Delhi and Agra, possessed many more caravansaries than did large but more purely commercial towns, such as Banaras and Patna.[11]

Successive Mughal sovereigns were ever eager to make a show of their support for trade, traders, and producers, and each emperor expressed a keen interest in matters concerning commerce. Once a month, in conjunction with the hosting of a royal feast, Akbar gathered a large assembly for a market fair, called *Khushroz*. According to the *Ain-i Akbari* "merchants from all countries" would attend this event, "and buying and selling [was] quite general". Akbar himself took a direct interest in and would observe

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Relations, c. 1550-1750", JESHO, vol. xxxvii (2), 1994, pp. 202-27.

[9] Niccolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, 1653-1708, Vol. I, tr. W. Irvine, p. 67.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 115. The noble Bakhtawar Khan, who built a sarai near Shahjahanabad supplied it, among other amenities, with shops and a market-place. Other high nobles were also credited with constructing sarais throughout the empire, see M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb*, Revised Edition. (Oxford, 1997), pp. 165-66.

[11] H. K. Naqvi, *Mughal Hindustan: Cities and Industries, 1556-1803*, (Karachi, 1974), pp. 92-93, 142-43.

the commercial transactions on this day. The occasion also provided "Bazar people" with the opportunity to "lay their grievances before His Majesty". The author of the Ain ends his description of *Khushroz* noting that "The profit made by tradesmen on such occasions is very great."[12] Tavernier relates an incident wherein the emperor Shah Jahan encountered a conflict between two caravans proceeding in opposite directions, with each claiming the right of way. Acting as if he were a magnanimous traffic superintendent, the Mughal ruler proceeded not only to impose a peaceful settlement, but reportedly gave each group of traders a gift of 100,000 rupees.[13] Jahangir displayed an enthusiastic willingness to address merchants' concerns when, after having introduced changes in the weight and measurement of *mohurs* and rupees produced in the imperial mint, it came to the emperor's attention that the makeup of the new coins complicated commercial transactions. Without any ado, the emperor responded that "Since in all things the comfort and welfare of the people" were his concern, the old coins should be reinstated.[14] Jahangir expressed an interest in the layout and appearance of buildings and shops in important bazaars, and made a point of showering gifts of rupees, clothing and other valuables upon merchants, craftsmen and others gathered at bazaars.[15] Moreover, the emperor trumpeted his policy ordering the reduction or elimination of various cesses and customs charges upon commercial activity, favorably contrasting his policy both to that of previous rulers of India, and to

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[12] *Ain-i Akbari*, Vol. I, tr. H. Beveridge, pp. 286-87.

[13] Tavernier, *Travels*, pp. 40-41.

[14] *Jahangirnama*, tr. W. M. Thackston, pp. 123-24.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 241, 244.

that of contemporary rulers in other kingdoms. While taking note of the substantial loss willingly incurred by the imperial treasury due to his policy, he cancelled the "ancient custom" of the collection of transit duties in Kabul and Qandahar. Likewise, Jahangir ordered the reduction of customs charges in Cambay, implausibly boasting that as a result "even the term customs tax has fallen into disuse."[16]

Emperors insisted that military commanders, local rulers and *zamindars* ensure safe passage for trade, and showed a willingness to use force to impose compliance. Individual officials including *subadars* and *faujdars* were required to compensate merchants for goods stolen under their watch. Furthermore, many *farmans* and other government documents attest to the Mughal emperors' prohibition upon the collection of illegal transit dues by regional officials and elites, including *zamindars*, tax-collectors, market superintendents, police, *jagirdars*, and even governors.[17] Merchants often actively solicited such protections from the king or his regional representatives. Additionally, traders who attempted to evade payment of the required taxes could be treated with relative leniency.[18] Jahangir was willing to use force to collect debts from private merchants owed Sir Thomas Roe, while Shahjahan reimbursed merchants,

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[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46, 241.

[17] See, e.g. *The Shah Jahan Nama*, tr. W. E. Begley and Z. A. Desai, p. 509; Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, Vol. II, p. 423, 434; *The English Factories in India*, 1661-64, pp. 288-89, 394-95; *English Factories* 1655-60, p. 413; *English Factories* 1668-69, pp. 35, 166-67; S. Nurul Hasan, "Zamindars under the Mughals", in *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, R. E. Frykenberg, ed., (Madison, 1969), p. 22; M. P. Singh, *Town, Market, Mint and Port in the Mughal Empire, 1556-1707* (New Delhi, 1985), pp. 63-64, 134, 161, 162-3, 165, n. 1; Sunita Zaidi, "The Mughal state and tribes in seventeenth century Sind", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 26, 3 (1989), pp. 355-56.

[18] Writing in the mid-17th century, Tavernier noted that in India punishments were light in comparison to those prevalent in the custom-houses of Europe, *Travels*, Vol. I, p. 10.

directly from the royal treasury, who had been robbed at the port of Surat, but whom the governor had refused to compensate.[19] While the military and political difficulties faced by the empire in the late-seventeenth century prevented Aurangzeb from adequately enforcing his administrative declarations, he nonetheless attempted to ensure safe transit for and to prohibit illegal taxes upon merchants.[20]

The Mughal emperors from Akbar until Aurangzeb, then, are to be noted for their consistent efforts to protect and promote trade in the Mughal realm. Among regional officials and gentry, on the other hand, support for commerce was less consistent. On the one hand, numerous nobles contributed to the building of sarais and markets, provided security for transportation on Mughal roads, and reduced or eliminated customs duties upon trade. On the other hand, there are many recorded instances where imperial officials were reprimanded and occasionally punished for subverting the center's policy by harassing merchants. These cases are often adduced as evidence for Mughal hostility to commerce. More significantly, as discussed in the previous chapter, there is a long and influential tradition in Mughal historiography which argues that the nature of the state's fiscal system and patterns of expenditure ultimately undermined the growth of a commercial economy.[21] In making this claim,

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[19] *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, Vol. I, pp. 415-16, 436; Manucci, *Storia*, Vol. I, p. 197.

[20] *Mirat-i Ahmadi*, Vol. I, pp. 168-70, 286-88; see also Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, *The Life of Mir Jumla, the General of Aurangzeb*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi, 1979), pp. 269-70; Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, Vol. III, 3rd ed. (Calcutta, 1928), pp. 78-79.

[21] The proponents of the Aligarh School, including Irfan Habib, Tapan Raychaudhuri, Shireen Moosvi, and the late M. Athar Ali, present the most comprehensive and emphatic version of this view, although earlier scholars made essentially the same point, see e.g., Beni Prasad, *History of Jahangir*, 2nd ed. (Allahabad, 1930), p. 121; W. H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar: An Economic Study* (London, 1920), pp. 93-94.

proponents usually do not disregard or necessarily contradict the evidence that once a commercial infrastructure was in place, the imperial household and the regionally-based aristocracy stimulated the production and exchange of goods, using their immense resources to purchase a wide variety of products for household consumption. The typical approach, rather, aims to demonstrate that the manner in which the king and his nobles spent the agrarian surplus, combined with a propensity to abuse political power so as to exploit mercantile wealth, was detrimental to commercial development. In this view, it is acknowledged that state actors promoted monetization, cash-cropping, craft production, banking and money-lending, and economic exchange. But this structure, it is argued, was overlaid by a set of political imperatives which ultimately eviscerated a genuine market economy. This argument relies upon assumptions regarding the nature of the market economy and the structure of political power in Mughal India, which, upon closer inspection, stand in need of reassessment and revision.

Conceptualizing the market

The type of quantitative data normally used by economic historians examining premodern economies is, in the Indian case, relatively limited. The evidence that does exist has lent itself to varying interpretations, as Tapan Raychaudhuri notes in his essay on "Non-Agricultural Production" in Mughal India for *The Cambridge Economic History of India*. There he observes that one popular view portrays India, up to the time of the European Industrial Revolution and the onset of British colonialism, as having a highly developed and rich commercial economy, with production serving to supply for the needs of indigenous consumption, while also sustaining a vibrant export industry.

The opposing, but common interpretation of the premodern economy sees no significant market development, and typically emphasizes the "The double tyranny of a caste-based social system and a rapacious administration [which] destroyed economic incentives and inhibited mobility."[22] Raychaudhuri's own analysis reinforces the claim that wasteful spending by the royal family and the nobility combined with caste restrictions to retard meaningful economic growth. Thus the massive imperial expenditure on luxury items that visitors found so striking, along with India's reputed economic self-sufficiency represent, in Raychaudhuri's view, not positive economic growth, but impediments to a genuinely productive market system.

Raychaudhuri's conclusion is based on an implicit conception of what constitutes productive economic investment, and represents a teleological view of development based on the experience of modern industrial capitalism. His perspective is in its principles and conclusions shared by the work of Irfan Habib (and together are in fact representative of the core economic ideas which give coherence to the "Aligarh School" of Mughal historiography), although the latter explicitly formulates what the former leaves unstated. In an essay investigating the commercial economy of Mughal India, Habib writes that his analysis is "formally speaking, concerned not with the potentialities of growth, but specifically with the potentialities of capitalistic development. It is a reasonable assumption, however, that for all societies other than those of our own day, the only possible road to modern industry (as the principal lever of growth) lay through capitalism, and it may therefore be taken for granted that the

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[22] Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Non-Agricultural Production", *The Cambridge Economic History of India* Vol. I, c. 1200-1750, p. 261.

proximity to or distance from true capitalistic relations that a given pre-modern or modern society maintained offers a valid criterion for judging its capacities of growth, so that, in essence, the two questions may be treated as identical."[23] It is certainly logical to claim, as Habib does here, that for the modern world mechanized industry provided a unique means for unprecedented levels of economic growth and undergirded industrial capitalism. But it does not follow that the failure of modern India to develop a fully industrialized capitalist economy means that the premodern Indian economy lacked large-scale market expansion. In other words, even if for the sake of argument one grants the claim that the specific features of the economy of Mughal India made it inherently incapable of moving on to a modern capitalist form (in reality a questionable assertion), this retrospective view does not eliminate the possibility that the premodern Indian market possessed a real or potential capacity for growth. But if the preconditions for market growth are thus presumed absent, there can be no reason to attempt to identify and describe market institutions and practices. More importantly, however, the attempt to establish the absence of potentialities and capacities for modern capitalist economic growth has predisposed many historians to construe those institutions that *were* central to the economy of the precolonial period as serving no "rational" economic purpose, and possessing no commercial characteristics.

Analyzed from such an angle, the forms and effect of Mughal consumption and expenditure have been depicted as detrimental to the economy and even to the state

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[23] "Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India," Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perspective*, p. 181

itself. For example, the rulers' means for the acquisition of luxury goods has been blamed for causing myriad economic failures. Thus the services of craftsmen are seen as having been secured through the liberal use of coercion, thereby undermining the operation of a labor market, killing any incentive toward skill enhancement, and blocking opportunities for upward mobility.[24] The Mughals' exclusive interest in luxury goods is likewise faulted for inhibiting the production of medium and low value commodities, thus precluding the emergence of a "home-market" and corollary large-scale production.[25] The conclusion is therefore drawn that the Mughals' pattern of surplus distribution and consumption taken as a whole handicapped commerce and industry, and prevented significant capital accumulation.[26] The nobility's willingness to purchase luxuries without regard for the financial health of the empire has also been blamed for the neglect of timely payment of soldiers, causing military weakness and ultimately leading to imperial decline.[27]

The argument that the Mughal state prevented the growth of a market has been sharply contested by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, in his book *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500-1650.* Subrahmanyam takes aim at the Aligarh school, questioning the claim that the Mughal state imposed "forced commercialization," which implies the lack of genuine, or market-based,

[24] Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Non-Agricultural Production", *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. 1, pp. 266, 284-285.

[25] Moosvi, *Economy of the Mughal Empire*, pp. 293-95.

[26] "Non-Agricultural Production", *Cambridge Economic History of India*, p. 288; Ali, *Mughal Nobility*, p. 160.

[27] Ali, *Mughal Nobility*, p. 170.

commercialization. Looking at the agrarian revenue demand, he writes that "unless the state took a progressively increasing amount away as its fiscal claim, this stimulus would be more once-and-for-all than continuous. In point of fact, protagonists of this view are those who see commercialization as solely a function of the Command Economy, and, as we have argued in an earlier chapter, there are good reasons for arguing for commercialization 'from below' instead of solely forced commercialisation."[28]

Yet Subrahmanyam's actual examples of "commercialisation 'from below'" pertain only to areas of South India outside of Mughal control. Moreover, Subrahmanyam's initial argument is itself more qualified, wherein he is inconclusive about the economic impact of the state in the Mughal case, in contrast to the South.[29] Furthermore, his notion that the impetus for commercialisation derived from the state's agrarian revenue demand would have only a one-time impact, a claim that seems to imply that a stable level of taxation would lead to stagnation of the commercialization process. This is not necessarily so, however, since the effect on the commercial economy of the annual flow of revenue to Mughal officials and their dependents would have depended on what use was made of that money subsequent to its collection and initial allocation. This appears to have been overlooked by Subrahmanyam because his contention that commercialization was instigated by non-state groups ("from below") is, in this case, related to the marketing of agricultural products (such as rice traded from

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[28] *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500-1650* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 354.

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 65-68.

coastal South India). As such, he is concerned with identifying commercialization at the interface of trade and agricultural production. But the capacity of the surplus agrarian wealth extracted by the Mughals to contribute to the expansion of the market economy was in fact realized in a second context, namely, in urban and semi-urban environments.[30] Here, the regular influx of revenue had a cumulative impact on the economy that was both quantitative and qualitative, and helped sustain an expanding segment of the population devoted to commodity production and trading activities. Commercialization in the seventeenth century therefore needs to be examined not only in the linking of agriculture to the cash nexus, but also in relation to the manner in which participants in the Mughal political system reallocated and spent the revenue surplus, and it is to this subject that I now turn.

An alternative theoretical framework is necessary to avoid teleological pitfalls and to provide the tools necessary for analyzing the emergence of a market system within the political system of the Mughal empire. For this purpose I have found it useful to draw upon the ideas put forth in the seminal work *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*, edited by Karl Polanyi, et al., though without necessarily concurring with each of the historical and theoretical conclusions drawn therein.[31] In particular, my analysis finds congruence with the authors' central contention that the disciplines of modern economics and economic history have constructed a theory of the "market economy" based on the unique developments that

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[30] See Chapter 2 *infra* for a discussion of urbanization in Mughal India.

[31] Karl Polyani, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Peterson, eds. (Chicago, 1957).

first appeared in the 18th century economy of Europe, the most important being the institutionalization of a rational price-making mechanism in the exchange economy. This specific feature of the early modern European market has been assumed to be a universally applicable concept, and therefore, the authors argue, implies that only those societies, premodern and modern, that make rational calculations about buying, selling, and commodity pricing, can be said to possess a true market economy. Polanyi and his collaborators critique this "formalist" approach, arguing instead for a "substantivist" analysis to economic history. In this view, the formalist identification of the structure of modern industrial capitalist economies with "economy" per se, is replaced with a conceptual framework that is able to account for "the facts of the economy [which] were originally embedded in situations that were not in themselves of an economic nature."[32] Polanyi elaborates this point, focusing on what he calls the "instituted process" of obtaining material means to satisfy human needs and desires, a phenomenon he refers to as the "human economy." In premodern societies, this economy "is embedded and enmeshed in institutions, economic and noneconomic. The inclusion of the noneconomic is vital. For religion or government may be as important for the structure and functioning of the economy as monetary institutions or the availability of tools and machines themselves that lighten the toil of labor." This perspective will prove advantageous for the study of Mughal India in that it will allow us to identify processes of market formation which were intertwined with institutions such as the state, and to examine aspects of the market system which did not emerge within fully

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[32] "The Economy as Instituted Process," p. 242.

autonomous economic institutions nor operate only according to a distinct set of economic "laws" in the modern capitalist fashion. With this perspective in mind, I examine in the following section the ways that Mughal patterns of expenditure and consumption contributed to the growth of economic exchange.

Sovereignty, state formation, and trade

The notion that the Mughal emperor and his nobility perpetually indulged in wasteful spending on sundry luxury goods is premised on a vision of the state as a highly centralized structure built upon military conquest and ruthless coercion. In such a view, the sustained subjugation and exploitation of the peasantry, evident in the extraction of virtually all surplus production, was dependent upon the availability of overwhelming force. Indeed, superior military power and organization, based on the cavalry skills and nomadic lifestyle of Central Asia, was an important aspect of Mughal conquest and enduring dominance in South Asia.[33] Yet the notion that the empire could survive and flourish as long as it simply continued to extract enough resources through taxation and booty to fund the military machine begs a more fundamental question. For the very existence of a unified Mughal state and a coordinated military organization was predicated on the ability of the emperor to maintain the active loyalty of military leaders who might at opportune times and places be tempted to break away from the empire in pursuit of power either as independent rulers themselves, or in alliance with other political formations. In this context, the Mughal fiscal system did not represent an

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[33] Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire, 1500-1700* (London, 2002).

institution founded to serve a pre-established, unified military hierarchy.[34] Instead, the structure and operation of Mughal finance was deeply involved in the very process of state-formation, the establishment of a cohesive military organization, and the projection of Mughal authority. As cogently argued by Andre Wink, the Indian state should properly be conceived as the institutionalized attempt to balance rivalries between various power-wielding factional interests. The groups which the Mughals sought to incorporate within their proclaimed "universal dominion" included both autochthonous rulers and foreign warrior-leaders, as well as locally-based landed gentry, the *zamindars*. Key to this effort was the sovereign's ability to claim and redistribute sufficient revenue resources to the relevant parties in order to make participation in the imperial project worthwhile, while simultaneously preventing any single group from amassing so much wealth as to become overmighty and potentially rebellious. When capably administered, the repartition of revenue worked "as a device to maintain a unity of interests by keeping them divided".[35] In this system, the king laid claim throughout his domains to a portion of the agrarian surplus as a royal prerogative (*rajbhag*, king's share), while the nobles and gentry were granted shares in the remaining proceeds, enumerated in the form of "monetized honours."

Wink's study counters the common overestimation of centralized control and political order issuing from the imperial throne, and places the monarch's actions within rather than above the dynamic struggle for dominion. Furthermore, in conceptualizing

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[34] This is the view implicit in Tapan Raychaudhuri's analysis, *CEHI*, p. 172.

[35] Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 304.

the state system as a form of managed conflict, accompanied by ever-shifting loyalties, our attention is drawn to the way in which revenue proceeds were employed to consolidate authority and garner support, both across and between socio-political and economic groupings. Such a view opens the way for an examination of the significance of the fiscal system at the intersection of political and economic developments. The creation of social networks and the politics of patronage influenced and gave direction to patterns of expenditure in such a way that the state cannot be said to have merely channeled surplus wealth toward economically meaningless ends. Rather, applying Polyani's substantivist concepts, in the next section I will look at how the growth of trade and markets took place as an integral part of the process of state-formation.

The royal court served as an important arena for projecting Mughal authority over the nobility, and welding together a diverse coalition of warrior-aristocrats. The wealth acquired by the Mughals was utilized in order to develop a distinctive system in which bonds of loyalty were fashioned between the emperor and elites, as well as among elites themselves, to create a unified, although not homogenous, imperial establishment. On one level, this was achieved through the *instrumental* reallocation of resources, with the emperor securing the *amirs*' allegiance with the payment of cash salaries and assignation of prebendal revenue rights through the *jagirdari* system.[36] Because the emperor alone held the right to appoint high-level officials to their posts and distribute salaries and revenue assignments, this system reinforced the appearance of a highly centralized political power. Of course, the head of state was in reality

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[36] See Ali, *The Mughal Nobility*.

constrained to the degree that members of the nobility retained ties to local power bases or were able to construct potentially seditious factional alliances with one another. Nonetheless, however, the ability of the sovereign to lay a rightful, if notional claim to the kingdom's wealth was acknowledged by all participants in the system.

Equally central to the assertion of political authority in Mughal India were more *symbolic* displays of material abundance, as a sign that the ruler was the recipient of divine sanction. Royal ceremonial was invoked as a means to bind the *mansabdars* and nobles to the king, through a combination of elaborate ritual procedures and symbolic acts, carried out within the court. For the emperor, wealth was not defined merely in an instrumental capacity, as a means to buy the services of men to serve the state, to transform agricultural surplus into goods to be consumed, or as a store of value useful only for the efficient acquisition of various commodities. Rather, through ostentatious public displays and quotidian acts of generosity, wealth served as an embodiment and manifestation of the king's very right to rule. In the words of Chris Bayly "display and sumptuary expenditure was not a frivolous misappropriation of peasant surplus....Traffic in the material tokens of royal status was the outward mark by which rulers were recognized - the circulating life-blood of the traditional kingdom which nourished the princely, commercial and agrarian economies."[37] The intensely high volume and velocity of this traffic is given testament in Mughal court chronicles such as *Akbar Nama*, *Jahangirnama*, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, *Shah Jahan Nama*, and *Maasir-i*

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[37] C.A. Bayly, Rulers, *Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion*; *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 57; Cf. Jennifer Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India: Material Culture and Kingship* (London, 2003).

Alamgiri, which repeatedly devote themselves to detailed descriptions of royal bounty and largesse. These symbolic transactions were complemented by a set of customs initiated by Akbar which remained a fixed aspect of court ceremony until the reign of Aurangzeb. Among these was the creation of a master-disciple relationship between noble and king, meant to give expression to personal devotion to a ruler who styled himself a nearly divine figure.[38] The frequent gifting of "robes of honor" from the emperor to noblemen, a common practice throughout the medieval Islamic world, also served to reinforce bonds of loyalty.[39] In addition to the nobility, recipients of the king's favor included visiting dignitaries, merchants, the religious, artisans, and the poor. Mughal consumption, both through the open market and in gift exchange, constituted a full-fledged political discourse, allowing for the expression of sovereignty and fealty.[40] In this system, to quote Chris Bayly again, "The failure of the king to consume, the artisan to produce, or the merchant to market was tantamount to a denial of political obligation."[41] These obligations were encapsulated within a political hierarchy, and Mughal paramountcy required the elements of production and exchange remain subordinated to the will of the emperor.

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[38] J. F. Richards, "The Formation of Imperial Authority", pp. 127-129, 140-43, 150-157.

[39] *Robes of Honour : Khil'at in Pre-colonial and Colonial India,* Stewart Gordon, ed. (New York, 2003).

[40] Gregory C. Kozlowski, in an examination of Mughal support for Islamic institutions and religious figures, argues that imperial patronage "must be considered as part of a battery of arguments aimed at securing for emperors support from their own assertions of authority", "Imperial Authority, Benefactions, and Endowments (*Awqaf*) in Mughal India, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 38, 3 (1995), pp. 356-57.

[41] "The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930", reproduced in C. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India (*Oxford, 1998), p. 190.

The connection between royal and aristocratic expenditure and market development was particularly evident in regards to the trade and production of cloth and textiles. By the seventeenth century, cloth represented the single most important commercial item in India. The function of clothing in the representation of identity and authority contributed to both the economic and symbolic value of textiles. Douglas Haynes and Tirthankar Roy, focusing on the impact of elite consumption of textiles upon patterns of production, argue that state and market formation constituted interdependent processes. The cultural significance of cloth meant that "weavers were central to the very processes of state formation. High-quality cloths were critical to the status and commitment of a nobility and were thus essential to the establishment or attraction of a ruling elite.... The linkage between textiles and power did not always come in the form of direct patronage and could be shaped by more indirect kinds of aristocratic support, usually mediated by market formation....But so far as business depended upon security of assets, goods, and commerce, the markets themselves tended to be closely conditioned by processes of state formation"[42] The link between the Mughal state and the market in cloth was particularly evident in the demand for tapestry, a highly profitable item of trade, but one "for which there [was] scarcely any other buyer in the country than the King."[43] The impact on the market economy of

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[42] "Conceiving Mobility: Weavers' Migrations in Pre-colonial and Colonial India", Douglas E. Haynes and Tirthankar Roy, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, p. 39.

[42] The English East India Company claimed that "tribes" had to be given to Mir Jumla in lieu of customs duties. *English Factories*, 1655-60, p. 392 ff.

[43] *English Factories*, 1624-29, p. 95; see also p. 228.

Mughal kings' and nobles' expenditure may have been tempered by their employment of weavers at royal workshops (*karkhanas*) which operated outside of the general market, but nonetheless the majority of their cloth was procured on the open market.[44]

From the point of view of the king, then, reallocation and expenditure were geared toward a political project intended to reinforce the authority of the universalist monarchy, and to integrate military commanders of diverse backgrounds into a cohesive, loyal elite. Through this system the Mughals managed to balance "centralized power and decentralized responsibility."[45] The interests of imperial officials and regional rulers, however, were not identical to those of the center, and the revenue share taken by the nobility was used toward a political end that only partially aligned with that of the emperor. The nobles' disbursed their wealth so as to make a display of their loyalty to the sovereign and to project Mughal authority, but often also to forge alliances with local powers in order to increase their leverage, both against contending regional powers, as well as against the Mughal center itself. That such fissiparous tendencies were kept in check was due in part to the successful administrative centralization first achieved by Akbar. At the same time, however, many ambitious nobles remained within the imperial system only as long as their access to resources – in manpower and wealth – was limited so as to not permit any attempts to break away from central control. The redistribution of revenue through the *jagirdari* system, for a time a highly effective means of imperial integration, eventually empowered these same

[44] Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Cambridge Economic History of India*, p. 180; Habib, "Processes of Accumulation in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India", reprinted in Habib, *Essays in Indian History*, p. 268.

[45] J. F. Richards, ""Norms of Comportment among imperial Mughal Officers", in B.D. Metcalf, ed.,

elites to develop what amounted to "patrimonial states or 'subsovereignties' with their own bureaucracies."[46] Thus in the long run, the exigencies of Mughal state-formation engendered economic expansion, but in a form which vested regional elites with a degree of autonomy. As noted by Wink, in the end the political system of the Mughals meant that "Instead of etiolation of the economy *fitna* represented rather local accumulations of wealth which caused the decline of imperial unity."[47] The beneficiaries of this process consisted of individuals who owed their initial rise to power to imperial appointment, as well as regionally-based groups such as the Rajputs, Sikhs, and the Marathas. Regardless of their initial sources of power, however, members of the Mughal nobility took advantage of the access to resources, which participation in the imperial system provided, in order to build up local support.

Apart from the obvious importance of the concentration of wealth in regional centers for the growth of increasingly autonomous political formations, this process invigorated the exchange economy and altered the socio-religious order at all levels.[48] To understand this impact, we must examine how the various participants in the Mughal system interacted with merchants, as well as how they used their revenue income to promulgate their authority and to establish and maintain dependents and patronage networks, and how these contributed to the development of local and regional economies. Throughout most of the seventeenth century, that is, when the Mughal

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Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam (Berkeley, 1984), p. 262.

[46] Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, p. 314.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 380.

[48] The issue of social and religious change is the subject of Chapter Two *infra*.

empire was at its most powerful, growing regional markets increased the productivity and wealth of provincial economies, but without yet encouraging political fragmentation. At the same time, rulers involved merchants in their incessant political maneuverings, resulting in the sharpening of competition between trading groups. While this process could work to either the benefit or the detriment of individual trading communities, or might temporarily have a negative impact on localized commercial activity, in the long run it acted as a catalyst for the continuing expansion of markets.[49]

Within regional urban settings, *amirs*' households were major centers of economic activity, and the expenditure of the nobility represented a major source of demand for long-distance and high-value trade.[50] The establishments of the *amirs* represented cohesive units separate from the imperial household, consisting of members of the extended family, soldiers, bureaucratic staff, religious specialists, artists and workers.[51] A large portion of the nobles' income was used to maintain their military contingents as required by the emperor. But the nobility were free to spend their remaining income as they saw fit, and much of this was used to purchase goods on the open market. Furthermore, many nobles took significant steps to promote monetization and trade in the attempt to increase commercial activity in their lands. In the 1680's a high-ranking *mansabdar* in the Deccan by the name of Khwaja Shamsuddin was

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[49] Throughout the seventeenth century British merchants complained of harassment and exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous imperial administrators, but their share in the expanding Indian market nevertheless grew exponentially in the course of that century. See Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise*, chs. 3, 4 and 6.

[50] Moosvi, *Economy of the Mughal Empire*, pp. 307-08.

[51] Ali, *Mughal Nobility*, pp. 161-74.

described by Bhimsen thus: "He even gives encouragement to traders from some other territories, and he purchases all the articles of merchandise and relieves them of the entire load and burden. He would keep them as guests for a few days and then would allow them to go after seeing that they were satisfied in every way."[52] In 1691, when the Mughal prince Kam Bakhsh was on military campaign in the Deccan, he induced forest-dwellers to meet him at his camp and there gave them gifts and cash. These people lived outside of the money economy and hence it was observed that "They have no word for gold and silver, and showed no sign of joy at receiving *mohars* and rupees." On this same campaign, the prince also showed his concern for trade, using his own elephants, camels, and horses, to safely transport merchants' goods.[53] The price paid for goods by imperial officials could at times be higher than others were willing to pay, such as the offer made by the governor of Ahmadabad, Bahadur Khan, to buy lead and other products at Cambay for higher rates than what was being offered at Surat.[54] The expenditure of lower level officials within the *amirs'* households, while not well documented as with the *amirs* themselves, no doubt also contributed to the growth of regional economies. These officials did not amass wealth comparable to that of great nobles, but were nonetheless paid in sizeable cash salaries or with jagirs.[55]

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[52] *Tarikh-i Dilkusha*, tr. J. Sarkar, p. 146. This would seem to be Shamsuddin Khan, a "Deccani" noble, who had, between 1658-78, achieved a rank of 3,000/1,000; see Ali, *Mughal Nobility*, p. 236.

[53] *Tarikh-i Dilkusha*, pp. 178-79. The presentation of coins as a gift existed alongside attempts by Mughal officials to force tribal groups to pay taxes in cash rather than in kind, see Zaidi, "The Mughal state and tribes", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, p. 354.

[54] *English Factories*, 1668-69, p. 190.

[55] Richards, "Norms of Comportment", p. 268.

Mughal emperors attempted to reinforce their authority by traveling frequently throughout the kingdom, and required nobles to regularly appear at court to pay obeisance. And in matters of trade, the merchants of the English East India Company believed that Mughal governors would not consider openly taking actions that might go against the interests of the emperor.[56] But the normal absence of the emperor from any particular province meant merchants were often compelled to deal directly with the regional rulers and officials. Several episodes pertaining to the interaction between Mughal officials and European merchants reveal how traders attempted to negotiate the complex political conditions which obtained at the provincial level. It should be noted that the European records are especially useful in this regard because, while they offer detailed information on issues about which indigenous sources are mostly silent, the position of the European companies vis-à-vis the market and the Mughal state was essentially the same as that of their Indian counterparts, at least until the mid-eighteenth century.[57] In the provinces, in a manner patterned after that of the emperor, princes, governors, and high-ranking *mansabdars* often represented themselves as protectors of trade. Indeed, British merchants claimed that at the times when the Mughal governor was absent from Bengal, local officials were extortive to the point of impairing normal trading activity.[58] But because governorships changed hands much more frequently than did the imperial throne, traders were constantly forced to come to terms with new individuals appointed to this position. Each new posting was fraught with significance

[56] *English Factories*, 1668-69, p. 178

[57] See Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise*, p. 125.

for merchants, since the trading privileges accorded to specific groups had to be negotiated with every new ruler. As the European traders quickly recognized, in Mughal India there was no universally applicable, permanent commercial code. Rather, conditions of trade were set out in *nishans*, *parwanas* and *farmans* whose authority was directly dependent upon the ruler who issued any specific order, and which could normally only be obtained through negotiation and cash payment.[59] In looking at the specific case of the English East India Company's interaction with the Mughals, this factor deserves mention as having helped ensure the Company's successful prosecution of long-distance trade. In its early decades the Company was able to procure written assurances of trading security and privileges granted by both Mughal emperors and regional officials.[60] To be sure, such documents were often ignored by officials in regions distant from the imperial court. But the fact that the Company repeatedly sought to procure imperial *farmans* at some expense indicates that they were considered a worthwhile investment. In one case, the English even obtained concessions from the governor of Bengal by misrepresenting a farman granted them by Shah Jahan.[61]

Merchants of the Company repeatedly sent representatives to the governors' courts to obtain written confirmation of trading rights and privileges. A *nishan* obtained by the Company from prince Muhammad Shuja in 1656 was typical in its affirmation of

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[58] *English Factories*, 1661-64, p. 288-89.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

[60] An agreement between the English Company and imperial officials in Surat, and approved in a farman by the emperor Jahangir, details the types of assurances and privileges granted to the English; *The English Factories in India*, 1624-29, pp. vii-viii, 27-30.

[61] Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise*, p. 134.

exemption from customs duties, identifying *jagirdars*, *faujdars*, *zamindars*, tax-collectors and other low-level officials as culprits who tended to interfere with the English trade through eliciting forced purchases and the collection of illegal taxes.[62] Sometimes in the anticipation of a new governor's posting, merchants would appeal directly to the emperor to reconfirm trade privileges, such as the British asked of Aurangzeb in 1663 when the Bengal *subadar* Mir Jumla's death appeared imminent.[63]

While hostilities between different levels and groupings of rulers at the provincial level could create an often volatile political climate, the umbrella of Mughal rule generally prevented such conflict from reaching a point where market trade became seriously disrupted. Such was the case in Gujarat in 1668, when English East India Company servants complained that their privileges had fallen victim to an ongoing conflict between the governor of Cullian and the regional diwan, Mirza Karim Beg. The Mughal officials fought "soe that what one builds the other pulls downe, and wee are now denyed any abatement of customes for goods or provisions, otherwise then as it is at Suratt; which yet alsoe they assure us not, onely put us in faint hopes of some favour, which if wee will obtaine, wee must buy it by presents."[64] For the merchants this situation was far from ideal, but the prevailing circumstances clearly represented more of a nuisance than an impediment to profitable trade. Another incident from around the same time shows that the English were also capable of resisting demands

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[62] *English Factories*, 1655-60, pp. 109-12.

[63] *English Factories*, 1661-64, p. 288.

[64] *English Factories*, 1668-69, pp. 87-88.

made through political intimidation. In the port of Surat Mughal officials demanded a *quid pro quo* from English merchants in return for trading privileges previously granted. In 1669 Company officials were called to a public *darbar*, where "all the merchants and the Kings minnisters were mett in councell" and were told they must assist the Mughals in a conflict against the Portuguese. The Company, however, conveniently proclaimed friendship with both sides, and adamantly refused to commit any ships to the imperial cause, apparently without retribution. Merchants could themselves make use of political connections to resolve disputes with other traders, as illustrated in a case involving the prince Shah Shuja. As related in Company records, William Blake held bills amounting to over 6,000 rupees owed him by the prince, who was at the time governor of Bengal. Upon departing from India, Blake sold these bills to Dutch merchants. But due to political turmoil in Bengal the Dutch were unable to collect the debt from the prince, at which point they appealed to the *amir* and governor of Bihar, Daud Khan, for redress at Patna. While the English East India Company officials in Patna declared this to be a private affair of Blake and thus no concern of theirs, the governor saw it differently and forced the English to pay the debt to the Dutch.[65]

In their interactions with officials, merchants regularly complained that the political authorities demanded exorbitant "bribes" and "gifts" before granting anyone the privilege of unimpeded trade in Mughal North India. Yet this common grievance should not be interpreted as evidence of a pervasive anti-trade attitude among the Mughal nobility. For example, in return for the payment of bribes or gifts to governors,

[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 177-78.

merchants could be exempted from ordinary trading charges collected by low level customs officials.[66] The right to collect payments from merchant groups was itself a prize over which officials at various levels of the imperial hierarchy competed. Thus money obtained by a governor as forced bribes would usually stay in his private coffers, never reaching the emperor.[67] However, if the emperor's financial officers came to know of bargains being made outside of the approved channels, such deals could be scuttled. For instance, George Oxenden, when he was English East India Company President at Surat, managed to convince a newly appointed local governor, Rustam Zamir, to use his (Rustam's) influence with the emperor to increase the price paid by the state for lead (from five rupees per maund to six). Of this increased price, Rustam was to keep half the advantage. But when the King's broker, who had not been consulted about this deal and had lost his expected benefit, came to know of the change, he had the court send an order annulling the entire deal.[68] The goal in these disputes was not to inhibit trade but rather to assert authority and derive financial gain from commercial activity.

Furthermore, astute merchants attempted to use political contestation to obtain for themselves optimal trading privileges. Merchants and moneylenders were at times able to resist or avoid the demands of the authorities. The *amir* Inayatullah Khan (who held a *mansab* rank of 2,500/250) was unable to obtain loans from moneylenders (*sahukars*) because he lacked appropriate means with which to provide them securities.

[66] See e.g., *English Factories*, 1668-69, p. 181.

[67] Ali, *Mughal Nobility*, p. 178.

The circumstances enabling these particular moneylenders to refuse the nobleman's request are unknown to us, but the case provides another indication that the ruling elite did not wield unlimited power to economically exploit businessmen.[69] In another instance, the English merchant Jonathan Trevisa simply avoided, if only for a time, a meeting with Mir Jumla in Bengal in 1659, claiming that he could not meet the governor because he (Trevisa) had "no suitable present to offer him."[70]

Mughal ideology, money and the market

We can now see that what often appeared on the surface as Mughal hostility to or incomprehension of market exchange, was actually a sign of the intercalation of market development with a process of state formation itself characterized by semi-institutionalized socio-political conflict. Mughal ideologues were themselves not unaware of the central importance of trade to their attempts at state-building, and their notions of the proper place of money, merchants, and markets in the imperial order were expressed in official writings. Mughal ideas on this subject have received thoughtful examination by Peter Hardy in his brief but incisive essay, "The Mughals and Money."[71] In his reading of officially sanctioned texts such as Abu Fazl's *Ain-i Akbari* (c. 1595), Muhammad Baqir Khan's *Mau'iza-i Jahangiri* (c. 1612-13) and the anonymous *Tahzib ul Akhlaq* (1683) Hardy finds that the Mughals believed money and

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[68] *Ibid.*, pp. 198-99.

[69] Ali, *Mughal Nobility*, p. 169.

[69] *English Factories*, 1655-60. p. 293.

[71] In Christopher Shackle, ed., *Urdu and Muslim South Asia: Studies in honour of Ralph Russell* (London, 1989).

exchange should hold an essential but subordinated role within Indo-Muslim society and polity. In this scheme of things, the upright merchant may accumulate wealth, but he is obligated to acknowledge the supremacy of God and his representative on earth, the Mughal sovereign. Referring to the royal cult developed around Akbar's personage, the author of the *Ain* portrays a world where "the ruler illumined by divine light, must control human life, not man's desires expressed in the power of money." Thus the claims of the *Ain* "are resistant to the formulation of notions that the activity of exchange, 'the making of money' should have an independence and autonomy of it own with rules and codes of its own which are not subject....to any general, supra-economic set of values."[72] In the view advocated by the *Mau'iza-i Jahangiri*, lawfully acquired wealth and property are a blessing in this world and portend well for one's fate in the next. The possession of property can serve as a legitimate means for achieving high rank. Hardy concludes that the ideas expressed in the *Mau'iza-i Jahangiri* "encourage an enterprise economy, albeit on a small scale."[73] The pursuit and accumulation of money is for Mughal writers a respectable undertaking, but it does not express humankind's highest values. Taken as a whole, "Mughal Muslim thought rejects, explicitly or implicitly, any notion that money as exchange value or as a store of wealth should represent man's temporal fulfillment or that it should have untrammeled power over man's social relationships." In this, Mughal ideologues "placing hierarchical above

[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

monetary exchanges were offering an appropriate ideology for Mughal rule."[74]

Innovative and consistent efforts were needed to propagate this ideology in a milieu where the opportunity to profit from commercial ventures was increasingly available, a situation due in no small part to the efforts of the Mughals themselves. The royal court, always a central arena for the promulgation of imperial ideology, was host to an array of material and symbolic exchanges intended to serve this purpose. The centrality of money to ritual acts performed at court invested coins with a meaning that transcended (but did not obliterate) its economic value. Observers of the court often commented upon the Mughal emperors' disregard for the strictly monetary value both of coins and of items "purchased" by him, with his offerings vastly exceeding the market rate of the goods in question. In this context, *noblesse oblige* not only confirmed the superior social position of the ruler, it also served to place money in a subordinate position within the hierarchy sanctioned by the state. Some of the most common examples in this regard were the occasions whereby the emperor valued money by weight or volume before distributing it to those deemed either worthy or needy. Akbar adapted for the Mughals the ancient custom of annually weighing the emperor on a scale against a pile of goods including gold and silver coins. Jahangir observed that while this represented a Hindu custom, it was nonetheless legitimate because it had received his father Akbar's approval.[75]

Two stories concerning Jahangir related by Manucci further demonstrate the

[74] *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 26

[75] *Jahangirnama*, p. 139.

phenomenon whereby money was valued by volume rather than exchange value. As an illustration of Jahangir's generosity, Manucci writes that "the least sum he ever ordered to be given to anyone was one hundred thousand rupees; nor was it seldom that he made this present; he did so many times, just as if it were of no account, while it is a large amount. The king ordered one hundred thousand rupees to be laid on the ground so that he might see its height. This was done. The *wazir* believed that on seeing its bulk he would be more chary of ordering the giving of so much coin. It was the contrary that happened, for he said he had thought one hundred thousand rupees would take up more space; and thus, from this time, when he made a gift, he ordered the double to be given of what he had given before."[76] Jahangir's showy pretense of indifference to the intrinsic value of coins which so perturbed the *wazir* could not be in starker contrast to the ethos of merchant and moneylender.[77]

Another story related by Manucci shows Jahangir's munificence toward a French trader who had "brought from Europe some bric-a-brac, which, although curious, was of little money value, hoping to sell it to the king." Jahangir had the items purchased, ordering that the merchant be paid whatever amount the latter requested, which came to 30,000 rupees. The emperor picked from among the goods a miniature padlock, and remarked that it "was not the work of human hands, but of angels" continuing that "no one but the King of Hindustan could pay the price of it, and after many exaggerated words he directed them to give the merchant thirty thousand rupees

[76] Manucci, *Storia*, Vol. I, p. 166.

[77] For a portrayal of the latter's fastidiousness in matters economic, see Tavernier, *Travels*, pp. 29, 35.

more."[78] For Jahangir's action to have its intended effect in this instance, the emperor needed to ascertain from the merchant the market rate for the goods, so that he could then make his extravagantly excessive payment. The entire interaction can in fact be interpreted as a manifestation of the emperor's ability to recognize and honor the merchant's profession, while simultaneously transcending the parsimoniousness inherent in market exchange.

In sum, the Mughal state on the whole consistently promoted the exchange economy, but always tried to ensure that trade and traders would retain a subordinate position within the imperial framework, dominated by a pyramidal hierarchy headed by the emperor himself. The money economy was closely integrated into the state from the empire's inception, and Mughal ideology and ritual recognized commerce as a legitimate, even essential part of a properly functioning society and empire. Paying inordinate attention to prices, accounting matters and the like, along with excessive accumulation of wealth were deemed to be attributes ill-suited to the life-style of a warrior-aristocracy, but this did not prevent the Mughals from sanctioning a respectable role, even if a proscribed one, for merchants and money-lenders. Indeed, rulers fully recognized the contribution traders made to the economic success of the empire, and took appropriate measures to facilitate commercial activity. A commercial infrastructure of roads and markets received imperial support, provincial officials were commanded to protect trade, and merchants were honored by the emperor himself at the royal court. Furthermore, Mughal expenditure continually augmented the market

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[78] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

economy. Regal consumption put surplus wealth into circulation, and the employment of revenue resources in the process of building political alliances injected wealth into provincial centers, where patterns of consumption and patronage further encouraged market growth. Certainly the political conflict endemic to the Mughal state system was a potential source of commercial instability, while the frequent transfer of governors and *jagirdars* from province to province introduced a degree of unpredictability for merchants. Yet these disruptions were tempered by merchants' alacrity in obtaining written pledges of security from emperors and regional officials, along with their ability to shrewdly negotiate the terrain of factional politics. Those individual merchants and merchant groups who were less astute at dealing with the authorities could suffer as a result of their shortcomings, but the general political climate established by the emperor meant that the market economy as a whole continued to flourish.

CHAPTER TWO

Caste, Devotionalism and the Commercial Economy

Introduction

Bhakti ("devotionalism/devotionalist") traditions of the early modern period have had a deep and extensive impact on the Indian religious landscape, with most contemporary practices and beliefs of Hinduism and Sikhism having been profoundly shaped by their teachings.[1] In this chapter I will focus on the socio-economic context of bhakti teachings, examining in particular the connection between devotional movements, the market economy, and social protest as defined primarily by the opposition to religious orthodoxy and an anti-caste position. In the field of bhakti studies, this topic has received relatively little attention in comparison to the theological, literary, and political aspects of devotionalism. Those studies which have attended to the historical and economic context in which bhakti traditions emerged and spread highlight the appeal of the movement to social classes experiencing upward mobility in the wake of technological and economic growth. In this view, bhakti provided ideological legitimacy and conferred a higher status upon those who had already increased their economic standing. What this "economistic" view usually fails to account for, however, is the role played by devotional movements in not merely reacting to, but in shaping the larger socio-economic context, primarily through creating and developing essential elements of the organizational structure and value system

[1] David Lorenzon, "The Historical Vicissitudes of Bhakti Religion", *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action* (Albany, 1995), p. 1; Karine Schomer, "Introduction: The Sant Tradition in Perspective", *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Delhi, 1987), p. 1.

undergirding the expansion of a market economy. In other words, the beliefs and practices of devotionalism need to be seen not as an after-effect but rather as part of the process which created the social and economic conditions for the market to emerge and flourish. Understood in this sense, devotionalism was at the heart of commercialization in early modern India, not a mere "epiphenomenon" of supposedly deeper structural changes.

Caste and Commercial Exchange

Historical assessments of India's commercial economy are invariably compelled to address the question of caste. Caste has commonly been held accountable for blocking the type of change which would have been required for the emergence of social relations conducive to a full-fledged market system in South Asia. Indeed, the alleged pervasiveness and antiquity of caste has meant that it has normally been viewed as even more culpable in this regard than a Mughal aristocracy ostensibly pursuing lavish lifestyles wholly unconcerned with productive investment, the subject of the previous chapter. Satish Chandra, in his classic study of the role of "the *jagirdari* crisis" in Mughal decline, in fact implicitly implicates caste in both imperial and economic failure, writing that "the problem of the *jagirdari* system was, at root, a social problem which no mere economies in expenditures and administrative devises for expanding cultivation could solve. What was really required was the rapid expansion of industry and trade, based on the introduction of new technology and the removal of all barriers hindering that expansion. These barriers, in the ultimate resort, were the barriers of the existing social order which encompassed trade and industry in too narrow

a sphere. Hence, a basic improvement in the situation was beyond the competence of any one king."[2] More recently, Tapan Raychaudhuri has argued that the conservative social and economic structure of villages in Mughal India was able to accommodate new economic demands without experiencing substantial change or social differentiation, and he flatly concludes that "There is nothing to indicate that the traditional system was dissolving through the operation of the market forces."[3]

I will begin this chapter with a review of the classic understanding which views caste as a major impediment to trade, followed by a discussion of recent reassessments which portray caste as compatible with, or even conducive to commercial activity. I will then situate my approach vis-à-vis the major studies of the relation between caste and commerce in premodern India. This discussion of caste is directly relevant to our understanding of bhakti since one centrally defining feature of the devotionalist movement in early modern India was its relentless opposition to the traditional system of caste hierarchy.[4] Indeed, the achievements of devotional movements can only be appreciated when seen within the context of a socio-religious environment suffused with ideas and practices rooted in the elaborate hierarchies of the caste system. The devotionalist criticism of caste was accompanied by the promotion of those values associated with commercial activity, and I thus devote the final sections of this chapter to a discussion of the specific aspects of devotionalism that fostered commercial

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[2] Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-1740*, 4th ed. (Oxford, 2002 [1959]), p. 33.

[3] Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Non-Agricultural Production", *CEHI*, p. 280.

[4] Karine Schomer, "Introduction", in K. Schomer and W. H. McLeod (eds.) *The Sants*, p. 8.

expansion. I discuss how devotional poetry expounded a value system that facilitated trade by rejecting or reforming caste restrictions, imparted a work ethic and new time-consciousness to individuals and groups entering artisan trades, and portrayed mercantile beliefs and practices in a positive light to society at large.

Until quite recently, most scholarship has viewed caste as the dominant, even quintessential, social institution in India, even though the exact nature and significance of the caste system was subject to debate.[5] The scholarly literature on caste is correspondingly vast, but our concerns mean that we will only engage that part of these writings which deals with issues of the economy. For historians and social scientists concerned with economic history, and more specifically with commerce and trade, the central issue of interest has been the significance of caste for market exchange in the supra-local context. The overwhelming consensus in this work has been that the nature of caste prohibitions on social intercourse represented the principle obstacle to the progress of commercial growth in premodern South Asia.[6] It will prove useful to provide a brief account of the conventional definition of caste, and to provisionally identify the way in which caste has been seen to have functioned so as to inhibit commercial exchange and market creation. This description is necessarily tentative, since, as will be seen shortly, the very notion that caste everywhere and at all times

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[5] David West Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars* (Berkeley, 1994), chapter 2 *passim*; Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, 2001), chapter 1 *passim*.

[6] For a comprehensive overview of the study of caste and commercialism, see Rudner, *Ibid.*, chapter 3 *passim*; see also C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 189; Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Non-Agricultural Production", *Cambridge Economic History of India,* Vol. I, c. 1200-1750, p. 261.

exhibits an essential and immutable character has been refuted in recent scholarship. Acceptance of these critiques, however, does not necessarily invalidate the usefulness of a more circumscribed notion of caste, which I will employ in the present chapter.

The word "caste", derived from Portuguese usage, has served as a translation of the Sanskrit terms *varna*, and of *jati*, variously or in combination. *Varna*, a term which first appears in the Vedas, indicates an ideal division of human society into four separate, hierarchically arranged categories: *brahman* (priest), *kshatriya* (warrior, king), *vaishya* (agriculturalist, merchant, artisan), and *shudra* (menial laborer, servant). *Jati* is taken to indicate descent-based subcastes, to connote a hereditary occupational specialization, and is manifest as a system operative within a regional or local context. Individual caste (sometimes subcaste) groups are endogamous, do not interdine with other castes, and each follows its own customary social prescriptions. Castes are hierarchically ordered according to their relative degree of socio-religious "purity" or "pollution". These concepts denote the hereditary status of castes (so that lower castes are more impure by gradations), apply to life-cycle events (death, for example, carries impurity), and represent religious "substances" which are transmittable among people, and between people and objects. Central to our concern, the need to control one's contact with potentially polluting people and objects meant that, in caste society, interpersonal contact and the exchange of goods were limited to highly circumscribed locales, wherein individuals had knowledge of each other's caste background.[7] Most

[7] Within localized contexts, products such as raw agricultural products were not considered as carriers of pollution. For other items, ritual procedures allowed for the purification and hence exchange of goods, but always within a closed system of "gifting" and prestation, known as the *jajmani* system, not as market

economic exchange in Mughal India was conducted within the purview of this restricted social space.[8] Such caste prohibitions worked in two distinct ways to prevent the emergence of a large-scale exchange economy. First, it blocked the establishment of links between merchant groups of varied caste backgrounds. While a single caste group could operate with members stationed at geographically dispersed commercial nodes, contact with people from outside one's caste would at some point be unavoidable in most forms of supra-local trade. Second, the notion that pollution passed from producers to the goods they produced barred the development of genuine commodities, whose value would be determined by economic and not social or religious criteria.

The prevalence of this view can in large part be ascribed to the profound influence of Max Weber's imposing study of the subject. Indeed, the scholarly understanding of the historical impact of both caste and, to a lesser degree, devotionalism as well, upon economic development has been deeply marked by Weber's studies of Indian religion. Weber's study of Hinduism, conceived as part of a comparative analysis in his larger investigation into the causes giving rise to modern capitalism in Europe, was primarily concerned to outline the reasons for India's failure to develop a modern, industrial capitalist economy. Weber sought to find a major cause of this failure in the sphere of Indian religion.[9] For Weber, modern capitalism, a

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exchange. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago, 1980), ch. 6, "Rules Concerning Contact and Food."

[8] Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Inland Trade", *Cambridge Economic History of India* p. 325.

[9] Weber was no simple religious reductionist or "idealist" (as opposed to materialist), and he was careful to identify the other factors leading to the emergence of modern capitalism in Europe, including the role of technology, science, law, stages of economic development, government administration, and rational book-keeping. Nonetheless, Weber does grant religious beliefs and ethics a uniquely powerful role in

uniquely European creation, originated in the "this worldly ascetism" of the "Protestant ethic," wherein religious duty centered on rationalized self-control, focused on worldly, material affairs, and conceived of the divine will as commanding that every individual pursue a specific occupation. These factors were seen as preconditions for the processes of capitalist wealth accumulation and the rational organization of the labor force. Protestant - particularly Puritan and Calvinist - thinkers wrote of the moral obligation to acquire wealth, the religious justification for a division of labor, and the ethical obligation to spend one's time in productive endeavor. Prior to the Reformation, argues Weber, religious asceticism required the renunciation of physical pleasure as well as the pursuit of wealth, and advocated a passive contemplation of God. At the same time and in contrast to this religious ideal, wealthy feudal households indulged in the acquisition, consumption, and enjoyment of luxury goods. Protestantism rearranged and transformed these religious and social patterns, inaugurating the modern capitalist enterprise. Protestant writers promoted the idea that work, carried out in a life-long occupation to which individuals were "called" by God, was itself the highest form of asceticism.[10] The material products of such labor were ultimately the property of God, temporarily entrusted to the believer, and simultaneously a sign of God's blessings. In this way the acquisition and accumulation of wealth was made a religiously meritorious undertaking. Simultaneously, the renunciatory impulse was retained, since such worldly goods were not to be consumed for sensual enjoyment, but were rather to be

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having provided the individual and collective motivation to rationalise economic activity, at the moment of the origin of modern capitalism. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. T. Parsons (London, 1930).

accumulated and invested in such a way as to further the spiritual good of the individual and community. In this new sacred dispensation, the "limitation of consumption [was] combined with this release of acquisitive activity, [so that] the inevitable practical result is obvious: accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save. The restraints which were imposed upon the consumption of wealth naturally served to increase it by making possible the productive investment of capital."[11] Finally, the Protestant worldview is identified by Weber to be the singular constant factor encouraging "the development of a rational bourgeois economic life", so that this religious outlook "stood at the cradle of the modern economic man."[12]

The logic behind Weber's argument concerning the causes of the European origins of capitalism entails the claim that India's failure to develop a similar economic system must have been due to lack of an equivalent "spirit of capitalism" in its religious traditions, especially the dominant one of Hinduism. Weber's analysis of Indian society is therefore subjugated to the overall imperative to find non-rational (or irrational), fatalistic and "other-worldly" features that were ostensibly characteristic of Oriental religions generally, and Hinduism specifically, and which presented "spiritual obstacles" to the "development of rational economic conduct."[13] Weber systematically

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[10] See esp. Ch. III, "Luther's Conception of the Calling", *Protestant Ethic*.

[11] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, p. 172.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27. It should be noted that Weber did not fail to acknowledge that his studies of Eastern religions, including Hinduism, were intended to examine only those cultural aspects that differed from Protestantism, specifically concerning the impact of religion on socio-economic organisation; his study of Hinduism is in this respect partial by design; see pp. 27-28. Nonetheless, Weber's particular concerns and assumptions predestined his analysis to find the irrational, rather than the merely different, in

pursues this goal in his book *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, where he argues that non-rational forms of religious thought and social organization were inherent to the caste system, which at the same time provided the basis for social integration, but only at the cost of emphasizing stability over change, and thereby inhibiting the type of social transformation required for commercial development.[14] He portrays caste as the very essence of Hinduism, writing that "Caste, that is, the ritual rights and duties it gives and imposes, and the position of the Brahmans, is the fundamental institution of Hinduism. Before everything else, without caste there is no Hindu."[15] Weber viewed caste hegemony as responsible for India's failure to develop the social, political, and economic forms of organization necessary for the rise of a large-scale market system, and ultimately, modern capitalism. Thus the ritual barriers between different caste groups, themselves representing hereditary occupational categories, prevented the emergence of trade and craft guilds, thereby inhibiting the economic integration of large geographical areas.[16] Under the debilitating and "completely traditionalistic and anti-rational" influence of caste neither could urban markets emerge nor could cities develop an autonomous, corporate character.[17] Weber notes that while at times Indian merchants and artisans could overcome "particular

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Hinduism. This is borne out in his analyses of both caste and devotionalism. Most studies written after Weber that deal with the significance of Indian religion for economic development bear this imprint.

[14] *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (1958), esp. chapters 1-3 *passim*.

[15] See *ibid.*, p. 29.

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 29ff.

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 111, 127-129.

difficulties" posed to commercial development by caste, in the last analysis, "The core of the obstruction was rather imbedded in the 'spirit' of the whole system."[18]

While Weber's views of caste and economy long enjoyed a widespread scholarly acceptance, they have recently been challenged from several angles. In a review of the scholarly literature on caste and the precolonial Indian economy in his book *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars*, David Rudner observes that there has now appeared a significant amount of revisionist scholarship challenging the conventional Weberian view by presenting evidence of a substantial indigenous mercantile system and "manufacturing industries." Yet, even in the majority of these studies, notes Rudner, "the revisionist work directs its attention toward aggregate measures - of trade volume, terms of trade, or quantity of money. Excepting only some of the most recent studies….almost no one addresses the specific institutions that were agents of Indian commercial activity in the colonial or precolonial periods."[19] He goes on to note that even in the work of one of the scholars whose work constitutes an exception to this trend (and the only one whose writing deals with North India), namely Chris Bayly, the question of the potential role of caste in contributing to mercantile pursuits is largely bypassed.[20]

Rudner's critique is intended to situate within the scholarly literature his own original and "resolutely anti-Weberian" contribution emphasizing the usefulness for mercantile endeavors of caste organization in a specific community. As such he is

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[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

[19] *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India*, p. 34.

concerned with demonstrating how the historiography of India has neglected to address this dimension of caste associations. Rudner argues that the underlying reason for this neglect lies in the mistaken assumption that India was incapable of capitalist development due to its lack of Western-style commercial institutions, such as "economic activities organized by contract law, commodities markets, stock markets, central banking institutions" and so forth.[21]

In his own research, Rudner refutes this assumption by revealing the ways in which caste organizations have in fact provided the means for "rational" business practices and thereby served to develop an indigenous market system. Focusing his research on the Nattukottai Chettiar caste's commercial operations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Rudner identifies the various organizational means, financial mechanisms, social values, and other elements used by this group to foster its capitalist enterprise. Comparing his findings regarding Nakarattar belief and practice to that of the Protestant capitalists analyzed by Weber, Rudner observes that in the matters of both frugality and the identification of capitalist profit as a religious duty, the Nakarattars looked very much like their European capitalist counterparts. But upon closer examination, significant underlying differences can be seen between the two groups. First, claims Rudner, individual Protestant businessmen acquired wealth for the betterment of society as a whole, whereas Nakarattars aimed only to serve more narrow groups, such as their own caste and kin. Consequently, "the Nakarattar Hindu ethic was

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[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

marked, from the Weberian viewpoint, by a paradoxical amalgam of rationality and collectivism, rather than by rational individualism." Second, Rudner also notes that Weber's concentration upon Hindu doctrine is misguided, since in Hinduism orthopraxy takes precedence over orthodoxy. It is, therefore, dangerous to explain Hindu economic behavior only by reference to religious doctrine. Rudner instead argues that the Nakarattar capitalist spirit is better revealed by examination of that caste's ritual and business practices, where he locates their organizational effectiveness.

Rudner's conclusions are persuasive as regards the experience of the particular South Indian caste community during the colonial period that he examines. In an intricate analysis, he thoroughly documents the ways in which the Nakarattars developed, using caste-based ties, sophisticated financial and religious networks in the successful pursuit of profit. As such, Rudner's study serves as a refutation of the Weberian thesis that the caste system, *in toto*, is incompatible with commercial or capitalist pursuits, and in this represents a major break with the long-dominant view of caste. The forcefulness and originality of Rudner's "resolutely anti-Weberian" argument should not, however, lead us to simply abandon the notion that caste, in specified times and places, was indeed a serious impediment to commercialization processes in India. Rather, a prudent assimilation of Rudner's critique would result in a vision that acknowledges the fact that caste cannot be reduced to a single, immutable essence, immune to the forces of history.

The political and economic conditions in precolonial North India were in fact in many important respects distinct from those in which the Nakarattar merchants

operated, configuring the relationship between caste and commercialization differently. To be sure, as in the Mughal North, South Indian society was highly monetized, contributing by the sixteenth century to a high degree of commodity production and market exchange under the rule of the empire of Vijayanagara.[22] There was also a large-volume, highly valuable long-distance trade carried out on the coastal ports of the peninsula. But the character of the political economy in the South remained distinct in other important regards, including the organizational patterns of artisans (most notably the relative importance of weavers guilds in the South); the close relationship of merchant communities with the state; and the high level of officially recognized political power held by religious leaders and centered in temple compounds.[23] Each of these phenomena situated caste quite differently in South India in comparison to the North, allowing the caste system in pre-colonial South India a relative flexibility, and permitting a relatively high degree of social mobility. The roles of caste, religion, and state in the South Indian economy are best viewed as a useful points of comparison, rather than as a models to be applied to the North Indian case.

Recognition of the diversity and contingency of caste means that, theoretically, there is no reason to rule out the possibility that in Mughal North India, as with the Nakarattars, individual communities could have used their caste-based organizational ties to foster, rather than inhibit, long-distance exchange. Empirically, however there is little to suggest that any mercantile group achieved the level of organization based

[22] Burton Stein, *Vijayanagara*, pp. 47, 73-74 ; R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300 BC to AD 1300* (Oxford, 1996), p. 325.

purely on caste linkages in the North. Alternately, caste proscriptions could to some degree simply have been bypassed, although not eliminated, in the pursuit of profit, as is argued by C. A. Bayly in his pioneering work, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion.* His work, while focused primarily on the eighteenth century, that is, during the period of Mughal fragmentation and decline, nevertheless addresses issues relevant to caste and commercialization in the Mughal period. Bayly critiques "the still vital tradition of thinking about Indian society" inspired by Max Weber, claiming Weber's argument that "caste distinctions irreparably fragmented urban and mercantile communities" misconstrues the real nature of caste. He counters Weber by providing evidence for "mercantile and credit organizations, conceptions of credit, local defence associations and festivals [that] necessarily breached....caste boundaries" and thereby contributed to long-distance economic exchange.[24] Bayly focuses on mercantile organizations which established linkages in areas that were outside of and irrelevant to caste restrictions, the latter being operative primarily in the realms of commensality and kinship, in order to demonstrate how traders exchanged commodities, arranged forms of credit, and made contractual business agreements, while not violating caste taboos.[25]

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[23] See Vijaya Ramaswamy, "Artisans in Vijayanagara Society", *IESHR*, Volume XXII (4), 1985, pp. 417-43; Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case* , pp. 63-104.

[24] *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, pp. 187-9.

[25] The ability of merchant groups to retain caste taboos while developing economic ties with other castes has been examined in a modern setting by Leighton W. Hazlehurst, "Caste and Merchant Communities", in M. Singer and B. S, Cohn (eds.), *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 285-297.

In a subsequent essay dealing with this topic, "The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930", Bayly follows a different line of argument, but draws the same conclusion, namely that early modern India was able to overcome caste strictures to develop a substantial degree of market-based exchange. In this essay, Bayly emphasizes the centrality of the state during the Mughal period for creating conditions conducive to the development of a market system, and sees the institutions of kingship as central for overcoming the anti-mercantile ethos of caste.[26] Citing an article by the anthropologist Celestin Bougle, Bayly describes how caste related notions of purity and pollution worked against the establishment of a market economy, because fears of ritual pollution meant that goods could only circulate in highly circumscribed locales, a process that Bougle labeled "singularization". But according to Bayly, Bougle failed to account for the countervailing forces of commoditization, which were centered in the institutions of kingship and the state. Initially, it was the state's revenue demand which provided the impetus for commercialization, since "In larger polities, exchange had to be general for kings to amass resources, especially revenue paid in silver rupees." At this point, however, an incongruity enters Bayly's argument. Whereas the state's revenue needs are at first posited as the source stimulating economic exchange, Bayly immediately goes on to write that "the major institution that mediated between commoditization and singularization was the office of the king, whether this be construed as the dominant

[26] "The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930", reproduced in C. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Oxford, 1998), p. 186.

caste brotherhood within the village or the emperor of all India. The duty of the king was to consume the wares of his subjects and to make his court the great engine of redistribution." In this claim, the king emerges as the mediator between two independent and pre-existent forces, those of singularization and commercialization, and not the progenitor of the latter. In the end, Bayly does not resolve this contradiction, but rather concludes that "it was changes in royal consumption, or the consumption of those aspiring to local political dominance, that provided the Indian economy with the dynamism that Bougle thought it lacked."[27]

Regardless of whether kingship is seen to have instigated or rather to have mediated commercialization, Bayly portrays the interaction between the caste system and royal power as comprising the basic dynamic that determined the extent to which commodity production and exchange developed. This view of the social and economic structure is based on a presumed inherent opposition between state (in the form of kingship) and society (ruled by the caste system), and perceives the state as the only entity with both the motivation and the institutions powerful enough to overcome the deeply entrenched traditionalism of caste. Here Bayly relies on the notion that caste was the dominant feature of the social order, and that the challenge to its hegemony had emanated from an entity outside and above society, that is, the state. It is significant that in this particular argument, when Bayly refers to the production of goods, he considers only the village as the place of commodity production, for it is in the confined social context of rural India that caste norms and restrictions are most evident and

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

enforceable. But in *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, Bayly himself has convincingly demonstrated the importance for the commercial economy of urban and quasi-urban settings, wherein both merchants and artisans were based. And it was the exchange economy that emerged in such locations which impelled people of varied social status to regular commercial interaction, a process that vitiated caste strictures. It was primarily city and town-based trade and artisan groups which promoted a market economy while opposing the caste system, but not as representatives of the state. Consequently, it would seem that Bayly has overstated the importance of "the king's classic role as arbiter between the castes" as the central means by which commercialism was advanced.

Bayly's discussion, while qualifying the Weberian understanding of caste, nonetheless accepts the idea that caste did indeed present a substantial, if not insuperable, obstacle to commercialization in Mughal India. This claim underscores the notion that caste in early modern North India had a significance specific to that historical context, which cannot be taken as representative of other manifestations of caste. The argument that caste did not represent a unified or homogenous system throughout the subcontinent has been recently advanced in Nicholas B. Dirks' major overview of the modern history of caste – and history of the study of caste - in his book *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India.*[28] It is Dirks' primary objective to reveal how caste as it functions and has been understood in modern India is a product of South Asia's encounter with British colonialism. In his argument, caste

[28] Princeton, 2001.

was reinvented within a colonial system of knowledge ultimately intended to provide a means by which to subjugate and control colonial subjects. Dirks argues that prior to British rule, caste was deeply implicated in politics, but only as one among a number of institutions involved in the political realm, and that caste was not nearly as unitary, all-pervasive, and central to Indian society as has conventionally been claimed. Dirks' effort to circumscribe the social significance of caste within parameters more in line with its actual historical role is certainly laudatory and in fact overdue. Indeed, it is difficult to argue with his fundamental claim that there can be "no single theory of caste", and that "caste has always been a contingent social phenomenon".[29] Dirks also convincingly demonstrates how the sociological significance of caste was profoundly altered as a result of India's interaction with the colonial British state. The danger, however, is that Dirks' treatment of the subject would seem to imply that in precolonial India caste was of little social importance. In his brief discussion of caste prior to British rule, Dirks, referencing a few Mughal era sources concerning caste (such as Abul Fazl's *Ain-i Akbari*, and European observances including Jean Baptiste Tavernier's *Travels in India*) claims that while caste represented a genuine social phenomenon, "it did not seem particularly striking, important, or fixed."[30]

In emphasizing the reification of caste transacted by British administrators and colonial (and post-colonial) writers and scholars, Dirks thesis underestimates the capacity of caste in its governing of premodern social relations. Such a perspective

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[29] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

[30] See *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

wholly overlooks the central concern with caste that appears in the writings of the widely popular devotional movements which gave voice to the many critics of caste and Brahminical hierarchy. The religious poetry of Mughal era devotional leaders is replete with vehement condemnations of caste and what was viewed as the moral hypocrisy of its Brahman supporters. In discussing such poetry below, while rejecting the essentialist thesis inherent in the Weberian understanding of caste, I therefore view particular manifestations of caste, specifically in regard to prohibitions of inter-caste social contact, as having represented a genuine obstacle to commercial growth. Although the British imparted a new universality, fixity, and ubiquity to caste phenomena, the social, religious, and economic significance of caste proscription was profound and deeply entrenched in Mughal South Asia.

Caste was never a monolithic, all-pervasive, and insuperable obstacle to commercial intercourse. For instance, as argued by the great scholar of Sikhism W. H. McLeod, caste restrictions on marriage and commensality within the Sikh community historically coexisted with vigorous denunciations of caste discrimination in matters concerning religious ritual and spiritual accomplishment.[31] Moreover, particular caste associations could even provide institutional support for trade, at least during the colonial period, as has been demonstrated by Rudner. Nonetheless, prohibitions on contact between different castes, and the objects they produced, were widespread in Mughal North India. This is attested by the intense and often bitter criticism of caste restrictions that pervades a great many devotional works, discussed below. To the

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[31] See pp. 33-38 *infra*.

degree that caste did prevent interaction and exchange, it presented a serious hindrance to commercial development. Such impediments were, no doubt, partially overcome by the royal court's function as an important center of economic redistribution. Furthermore, Mughal administrative centralization and the development of an infrastructure required for long-distance trade entailed the creation of some market elements. Due to the Mughals' own limited interest in mercantile pursuits, however, even when taken together the economic effects of Mughal rule were not in and of themselves enough to develop a full-fledged market economy. At the same time, Mughal improvements in infrastructure did lay the groundwork for merchants and producers to develop the market more fully. It was in these circumstances that the swift rise of devotional movements provided a coherent, assertive, and sweeping endorsement of the social values and networks associated with commercial production and exchange.

Devotional religion in North India

At the most basic level, bhakti represents the individual worship of a deity with whom the devotee has a spiritual relationship unmediated by any religious specialist, while spiritual merit resides in the quality and commitment of inner-states of devotion. The emergence in medieval India of such a conception of religion opened the possibility of salvation to all people, thereby reforming and at times repudiating the hitherto prevailing claim that only the higher or "twice-born" castes were eligible for spiritual deliverance. This core trait distinguishes bhakti from the traditions that emphasize external and ritualistic forms of worship, most prominently Vedic and Shastric Brahmanism, as well as orthodox Islam. Beyond this, several features are common to

many, though not all, historical manifestations of bhakti. An emphasis on emotional states such as love and longing for the divine presence tend to supplant concern with scriptural knowledge or ascetic renunciation. Bhakti hymns and poetry were usually composed in regional languages, making them accessible to a wide audience, while challenging the exclusive claims to sacredness made by brahmans on behalf of Sanksrit. The singing of these hymns in congregational settings became a popular devotional practice. Another common theme in devotionalism is the centrality of the spiritual teacher, the *guru* or *sant*, in guiding the individual devotee. Additionally, many bhakti traditions actively encourage devotees to partake in collective forms of worship, including congregational hymn singing and undertaking pilgrimages to holy sites and temples to receive blessings and merit.

Historically, the initial establishment of bhakti can be traced to the teachings of the South Indian philosopher and preacher Shankaracharya (788-820), who translated local Tamil language bhakti traditions into Sanskrit, and traveled throughout the subcontinent in an effort to establish institutional foundations for his teaching. Subsequent centuries saw the growing popularization of regionally-based bhakti traditions in South India devoted primarily to the gods Vishnu and Shiva, with sectarian groups becoming entrenched with the acquisition of royal patronage. Bhakti spread only slowly to North India, with Ramanuja (b. ca. 1017) and his disciple Ramananda being the individuals credited with the earliest significant achievements in this regard.[32]

[32] On Ramananda, see Enzo Turbiani, "Some aspects of the development of bhakti traditions, with especial reference to the Hindi poems attributed to Ramanand", *Devotional Literature in South Asia: Current Research, 1985-1988* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 49-55.

Over the next several centuries the bhakti tradition made little headway among the population of North India. It was only with the appearance of Kabir (c. 1398-1448), a figure who towered over the development of bhakti in the Mughal period and was to become to be the most renowned Indian *bhakta* in history, that devotionalism began to spread rapidly and widely. Born into a low-caste family near Banaras and a weaver by trade, Kabir composed some of the most enduring and popular bhakti poetry in existence. There is no evidence to indicate that during his lifetime Kabir studied under any religious teacher or followed any guru, although later tradition claimed that Kabir was a disciple of Ramananda. In and of itself, Kabir's relentless pursuit of spiritual insights, his incisive mockery of hypocritical behavior, and his uncompromising attacks on the socially and politically powerful groups of his time would have earned him a durable place in the devotional tradition. But expressed as it is in his vivid and powerful style, paradoxically eloquent yet vulgar, mystical and profane, Kabir's verse attained preeminent status within the expanding devotional tradition.[33] In addition to the formation of a sect (*panth*) developed specifically around the figure and teachings of Kabir, most of the subsequent major North Indian devotional movements acknowledge Kabir's greatness, incorporating his central ideas, and often his verses, into their own scriptural corpora. Kabir's individual genius and influence as a *bhakta* poet may not have been matched by devotional leaders of later generations, but between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, bhakti as a socio-religious movement nonetheless witnessed

[33] See Linda Hess, "Kabir's Rough Rhetoric", in *The Sants*, pp. 143-165.

its peak period in terms of overall creativity, and emerged as a truly mass movement in North India.[34]

Under Mughal rule, countless original devotional poems were composed in regional dialects, and were set to music and sung by traveling bards as well as in congregational settings, in this way reaching a large number of communities in North India. Consequently, devotionalist verses, images, and ideas circulated and intermingled, creating a heterogeneous but identifiably distinct religious phenomenon. The public transmission of such poems and hymns created a widespread familiarity with devotionalist ideas, generating in turn a variety of responses. Many adherents to devotionalist teachings formed themselves into distinct sects (*sampradyas*), each closely identified with the teachings and persona of a particular *sant*. These sects were subsequently subject to both expansion and to schism. Others who were exposed to devotionalist thought incorporated what they learned into their traditional religious practices and beliefs, in an either more or less formal manner.

The great number and variety of devotional movements that thus evolved in the Mughal period have presented scholars with a complex set of definitional and taxonomic issues, and have been a recent preoccupation for many scholars of the subject. The significance of the differences (as well as shared beliefs) between Sufi, Sikh, Vaishnavite, and Shaivite traditions, the place of the "*sants*" or popular poet-saints in devotionalism, sectarian schisms, and the division (and overlap) between *saguna* (worship of an anthropomorphic deity) and *nirguna* (worship of an unmanifest,

[34] See Karine Schomer, "Introduction", *The Sants*, pp. 1-6.

supreme deity) streams of bhakti has been thoroughly, if not definitively, discussed in numerous recent studies.[35] Scholars have also searched within this diversity for a unifying theme underlying all manifestations of bhakti religion. In her overview of the study of bhakti, Karine Schomer concludes that the bhakti movement in North India is perhaps best understood as consisting of "a cluster of individual bhakti groups, each with its particular emphasis." She identifies the regionally specific and historically independent traditions of particular bhakti groups, as well as the *nirguna/saguna* distinction, as examples of the differences within the larger movement.[36] Schomer also calls attention to the lives and histories of the *sant* poets, who represent a central part of early modern bhakti, and who during their lifetimes expressed little interest in developing institutionalized or sectarian followings, a trait which set them apart from other currents in the bhakti tradition, particularly Vaishnavite sects. Schomer concludes that "What binds the North Indian Sants together is neither an historical connection nor an institutional focus, but the similarity in their teachings", while noting that most *sants* were from low caste backgrounds.[37]

David Lorenzon has put forth a different theory about the unifying element in North Indian devotionalism, claiming that all manifestations of bhakti possess a "family

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[35] These issues has been taken up in the essays collected in Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod, eds., *The Sants*; for another sustained discussion of the meaning of the *nirguna/saguna* dichotomy, see David N. Lorenzon, "The Historical Vicissitudes of Bhakti Religion," in D. Lorenzon, (ed.) *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action* (Albany, 1995). See also John Stratton Hawley, ed., and J.S. Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, trs., *Songs of the Saints of India* (Oxford, 1988); Savitri Chandra Shobha, *Medieval India and Hindi Bhakti Poetry: A Socio-Cultural Study* (New Delhi, 1996); W. H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford, 1968) esp. pp. 151-58, *passim*.

[36] *The Sants*, p. 2, 4.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 8.

resemblance" defined by their shared origins in two medieval Sanskrit works, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. Lorenzon, however, believes that deeper insight into the history of bhakti requires an analysis of those features that divide bhakti into separate traditions. In this regard, his major subject of interest is the *nirguna/saguna* distinction. For Lorenzon this ostensibly theological issue becomes an analytically useful distinction for historians when it is properly perceived as a manifestation of conflicting social ideologies, clashing and interacting in an ongoing dialectic. *Saguna* bhakti, distinct from the older, more elitist Vedic Brahmanism, nonetheless possesses two central tenets drawn from that tradition. The first is the belief in transmigration and rebirth of the soul, a doctrine which maintains that morally good behavior in this life will lead one to be born into a higher caste in the next. The second shared tenet is the doctrine of *varnasramadharma*, the term Lorenzon often prefers over "caste". The apparent reason for this preference lies in the fact that his translation of the term as "the law of social classes and stages of life", incorporates both the notion of *jati*, which he translates simply as "caste", as well as *varna*, which he translates as "roughly 'class'". Propagated primarily, although not exclusively, by urban-based brahmans, *saguna* bhakti in essence represented an ideology, argues Lorenzon, which promoted upper caste and class hegemony. *Nirguna* bhakti, by contrast, was the doctrine championed by low caste and class individuals, and helped further their social and economic interests. Lorenzon argues that *nirguna* bhakti, which outside of the Punjab has always been a subordinate tradition, rejected *varnasramadharma* from the time when the former first rose to prominence around

1500 A.D. Proponents of the *nirguna* current simultaneously appropriated some *saguna* teachings while attacking the theological and social bases of *saguna* bhakti.

Lorenzon's conception of bhakti as social ideology, in a sense that denotes action as well as discourse, helpfully elucidates the ways that bhakti informed social and political struggles in specific historical contexts. His analytical framework can be usefully applied to the interpretation of religious texts, beliefs, and practices in order to address broader questions of historical significance. This moves beyond the argument made by historians who see bhakti as an attempt to provide socio-religious ratification for an already achieved advance in economic standing. There is, however, a serious hazard inherent in Lorenzon's approach, due to reductive assumptions about economy and class, apparent for example when the author asks, "to what extent does *sagun* bhakti's support for *varnasramadharma* represent a manipulation of religion for economic, political and status-related ends by the mostly brahman elite that wrote the *saguni* texts and propagated them among the general population, and by these brahmans' immediate class allies and patrons, the wealthy landowners and merchants?"[38] Lorenzon suggests that, while more empirical research would be needed for a definitive answer, *saguna* bhakti did indeed serve the interests of the class and caste elite. While the rhetorical assertion linking *saguna* bhakti with brahminical power can be questioned, the more significant problem concerns Lorenzon's assumption that traders and wealthy landowners constituted an undifferentiated class which supported brahminical caste ideology.

[38] "Historical Vicissitudes", pp. 19-20.

As discussed in the previous two chapters, the economic interests of the Mughal warrior-elite (who derived their wealth and status from control of land-based resources) were quite distinct from, if not necessarily in conflict with, those of the merchant class. If this distinction is ignored, one cannot explain either the close ties of *nirguna* bhakti movements with mercantile communities, or the repudiation of *varnasramadharma* by *saguna* traditions. The sixteenth and seventeenth century teachings of the Sikh gurus and of Mahamat Prannath for instance, clearly fall into the *nirguna* category and both strongly condemned Brahmans and caste, but many of the most prominent followers of these leaders were well-to-do merchants. Part of the difficulty with Lorenzon's framework is the presumption that the economic and political structure of early modern India was static. I am in agreement with Lorenzon's argument that the lower caste and class proponents of *nirguna* bhakti tried to wrestle control of economic resources away from brahmans, aiming to acquire increased political power and social status. But this struggle took place within political and economic fields that were undergoing rapid transformation in the Mughal period. In particular, the exponential growth of the commercial sector of the economy changed the balance of power between groups associated with production and trade, and the nobility. In this context, bhakti movements did not only comprise socio-religious groups fighting to advance their members' interests against an entrenched elite, they also represented an effort to alter the position of the market and its proponents vis-à-vis the state and society. In other words, supporters of bhakti aimed not merely to improve their standing within the socio-economic order, rather they also attempted to transform the very basis of that

order so that market forces could gain greater compass and would be granted a more respectable role in society. First and foremost, this necessitated the legitimization of the practices, ethos, and appurtenances associated with market exchange: buying and selling activities, trade caravans, bazaars and shop-stalls, sundry commodities, accountancy, profit-making, capital accumulation, and so forth. But the active propagation of such devotionalist ideas by proselytizing holy men was critical in the expansion of the market and in gaining wider social acceptance of commercial activity. Typically, *bhakta* preachers traveled constantly to cities and towns throughout North India to spread their message, exhorting listeners in public spaces – often bazaars – to commit themselves to the path of devotion. An examination of notable devotionalist poetry will testify to the centrality of market imagery in the bhakti movement, and the development of an ideology which projected commercial values into the social sphere.

The use of market imagery in devotional writing

To return to the case of Kabir, we can see that his poetry reveals an inconsistent attitude toward the market. Kabir occasionally uses commercial metaphors in his poetry, but when he does so his attitude toward these is notably ambivalent or at times contradictory.[39] For instance, his use of mercantile images in the following verse has a positive portrayal of a jewel merchant:

> Hari is the Diamond, the devotee is the Jeweller
> Who displays his wares on his stall,
> If a Connoisseur be found
> They will fetch a good price!

[39] Cf. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Introduction", in *Money and the Market in India, 1100-1700* (Delhi, 1994), pp. 23-25.

But the same metaphor employed in a later stanza devalues, although it does not denigrate, market exchange:

> Having found that precious Gem of Ram,
> O Kabir, don't loose you waist-knot [i.e., do not open your purse] –
> For that Jewel has neither market-town nor Connoisseur
> No buyer and no price![40]

Elsewhere Kabir uses merchant and money metaphors in a positive manner, such as when he proclaims of God that "Your Name is my fortune, your Name is my capital", and "My Lord is like a merchant, easily He goes on Trading".[41] Yet when taken in the overall context of Kabir's individual compositions, his commercial metaphors can rarely be said to convey an unqualified esteem for mercantile values. The uniqueness of Kabir, and his appearance at the very outset of devotionalism's *floruit*, makes it difficult to draw more general historical implications from his case in isolation. But the contrast of his poetry with that of later *bhakta* composers is informative, particularly as regards the significant difference of emphasis in the use of the imagery of trade and artisanal production. In the compositions of the popular *bhakta* and *sant* poets of the Mughal period, market metaphors become both more commonplace and much more uniformly positive than was the case with Kabir. This was true for the *sants* of low-caste backgrounds similar to Kabir, as well as for those born into high-caste households. Furthermore, while Kabir shared with other

[40] Quoted in Charlotte Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 194-95; for similar ambivalence, see the poems in *ibid.*, pp. 178; 243-44.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 259; Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabir*, Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1974), p. 197.

devotionalist figures a concern for the individual soul's liberation, he did not envision broader social change based on these ideas, as did many subsequent *bhakta* poets.

This change, I would argue, is indicative of the broader growth and increasing acceptance of the role of the market in Mughal era North Indian society, a development accompanied by devotional poetry and the movements it accompanied. As commercial relationships achieved greater social prominence, bhakti provided a vehicle for both the expression and advancement of traders, money-lenders, and producers. As argued in the previous chapter, the Mughals were tolerant and even supportive of merchants and trade, although official imperial ideology granted money and the market a notably circumscribed role. The Mughal state provided merchants with an environment in which they could operate with a reasonably high degree of security, thereby facilitating the strong economic growth of the period. The unwillingness of the Mughals to directly incorporate traders and bankers into the upper levels of the imperial government, however, left these groups to develop their own forms of organization, internal governance, and guiding ideology. At the same time, the traditional social order was dominated by Brahminical caste ideology which was overtly hostile to those practices associated with commercial endeavors. Thus neither state nor society furnished traders and artisans with a system of beliefs, values, and associated institutions which esteemed their place in society. In this context, bhakti teachings seriously addressed and articulated the social needs and demands arising from the changes involved in a process of rapid commercialization which met entrenched opposition, with many of the new followers as well as leaders of the bhakti movement representing those social groups

benefiting from the increased opportunities for upward mobility and accumulation of wealth created by the burgeoning commercial economy.

After Kabir's precedent, low-caste *bhaktas* achieved notoriety in North India. Raidas (c.1450-1520), born around the time of Kabir's death also in the vicinity of Banaras, is well-known for being a *sant*-poet of the *chamar* caste, a community which works with leather and is now considered "untouchable". The market references which appear in Raidas' poetry are notably positive, as in the following lines:

> Load up the caravan of Hari.
> I am a trader in Ram.
> I found the fortune of the Name of Ram,
> Through that I trade in *sahaj*.
> ....
>
> Transitory wealth is hoarded in the ground,
> Transitory fortune is searched for.
> One cannot hold onto the transitory,
> It wastes one's capital away!
> ....
>
> The company of the pure has become my capital,
> I have gained the priceless cloth.[42]

Raidas also addresses an entire lyric poem (*pad*) to a *banjara*, an itinerant overland transporter of goods, imploring him to perform good deeds and serve God, since "Hari will call for the accounts and you will pay".[43] And in the following verse attributed to Raidas, quoted here from the version incorporated into Sikh scripture, the poet even envisions God as a merchant:

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[42] Winand M. Callewaert and Peter G. Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidas* (New Delhi, 1992), no. 78, pp. 149-50.

[43] *Ibid.*, no 33. pp. 122-23.

He who gave life provides sustenance
Within every body He runs his market-stall [*hathu*].[44]

As with Kabir, Raidas seems not to have had a significant following during his lifetime, but his fame spread in subsequent years as his poetry was disseminated and adopted by devotionalist movements which blossomed in the Mughal period, including the *panths* established by the Sikh Gurus and Dadu Dayal.

Dadu Dayal (1544-1603) was himself a low-caste cotton carder, who resided in Rajasthan, but who traveled widely throughout North India, visiting such commercially important cities as Ahmadabad and Banaras. Such itinerancy was to become the norm for the *bhakta* preachers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In order to reach the masses of potential devotees, Dadu, like many other sant-poets, used a mix of regional vernaculars in his compositions. The acquisition of large followings by these *bhakta* poets clearly indicates a widespread receptivity of the North Indian population to the devotionalist message, but more than this it reveals the emergent interest in the establishment of socio-religious movements which could actively meet the concerns of individuals involved in commercial activity. In his study of Dadu Dayal's attitude toward trade, Harbans Mukhia concludes that "From the references made by Dadu to sections connected with trade and finance - the trader, the *sahu*, etc., it appears that Dadu gives them a place of high honour. He accepts the legitimacy of their business practices", and only demands that they operate honestly in their dealings. Mukhia notes that the poet's verses commonly employ commercial metaphors, so that "It is an

[44] *Ibid.*, no. 64, p. 142. See also no. 87, p. 155.

indication of Dadu's appreciation of the role of wealth and money in society that he often resorts to measuring even spiritual attainments purely in terms of wealth".[45]

Perhaps the best known example of a devotionalist tradition which valued and encouraged participation in the market economy was that established by the early Sikh gurus.[46] Founded on the basis of the teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the Sikh religion established firm roots in the Punjab region, gaining a following in particular among the Khatri trading community, to which the leaders or Gurus themselves belonged. In 1604 the poetic compositions of Nanak and those who succeeded him as leaders of the expanding Sikh community were compiled, along with the verses of other leading *bhakta* and *sant* figures and devotional hymns, in the most important Sikh scripture, the *Adi Granth* ("Original Book"). A number of Sikh sacred books were composed after the *Adi Granth*, which, while not being held by Sikhs in as high regard as the *Adi Granth*, nonetheless constitute influential and greatly revered scripture.[47] The most important of these ancillary texts includes the widely popular devotionalist and hagiographical *janam-sakhi* (lit. "birth-testimony") literature, dealing with the life of Guru Nanak. Compiled in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the *janam-sakhis* incorporate oral history and tales, and legendary and mythic stories gleaned from a variety of sources. Additionally, Sikh scripture includes the *Dasam Granth* ("Book of the Tenth Guru"), comprising the writings of Guru Gobind Singh (r. 1675-1708),

[45] Mukhia, "Ideology of the Bhakti Movement", *Perspectives on Medieval History*, pp. 60-61.

[46] J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge, 1990); McLeod, *Guru Nanak.*

[47] For a discussion of the and significance of this literature, see W. H. McLeod *The Evolution of the Sikh Community: Five Essays* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 20-36, 59-82.

collections of legends and oral traditions, and Hindu Puranic themes. Supplementary Sikh texts also include a number of works dealing with Sikh history and legend, biography, and philosophy.

The compositions of Guru Nanak in several important regards conform to the ideas of Kabir, and in fact many of Kabir's own verses were directly incorporated into the *Adi Granth*. Nanak's personal espousal of *nirguna* bhakti, the centrality he gives to the recitation of God's name, his repudiation of caste, and the strong condemnation of the orthodox ritualism of brahmans and ulama, represent a worldview closely in line with that popularized by Kabir. Indeed, based on these shared themes, Guru Nanak and Kabir have both been considered by modern scholars as exemplary representatives of the *sant* tradition. However, it has generally escaped notice that the religious and social ideals of Nanak and his immediate successors diverge from Kabir in their consistent and unequivocal celebration of the life of the honest and successful merchant. The following excerpts of verses from the *Adi Granth* combine the common devotionalist themes of the spiritual seeker and concentration on the divine name with a series of overtly mercantile metaphors:

> Brother! this self is the jeweller's shop; the wares in this
> Is the Name illimitable.
> Brother, such alone of the merchants grasp such wares
> As contemplate the Master's Word.
> Saith Nanak: Blessed is the merchant that uniting
> With the Master
> Into this transaction enters.[48]

[48] *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. II, tr. Gurban Singh Talib (Patiala, 1990-1995) p. 1332.

Make thy shop of realization mortality;
Therein make stock of commodity of the holy Name.
Make attentive devotion of the [shopkeeper's] storage vessels wherein
this commodity you keep.
In this trade have dealing with traders in devotion,
And thus the profitable bargain enjoy.[49]

Endlessly vast is [the] citadel of the self.
Bearing within it numerous markets
Whoever in it by guidance of the Master makes commerce,
Acquires the Divine commodity
Here may be bought [the] treasure of the Name Divine.[50]

The following verse makes use of similar themes, but notably uses the metaphor of the Guru as banker:

The Lord is all-goodness, inaccessible, unfathomable.
The Divine capital have I sought from the holy Preceptor,
the true banker
The Divine Capital have I sought, the Name purchased.[51]

As a last example, these lines invoke the travails of the itinerant merchant, and conceives of the Guru himself as a merchant:

Scouring over alien country to buy merchandise have I arrived.
Attracted by the incomparable wares you hold.
[The] capital of merit have I brought tied in a packet.
At [the] sight of this jewel is my heart ravished.
At the portal of the Merchant-Prince have we arrived.
Praying, bring out your goods, let us enter the bargain.
One merchant to a greater Merchant has guided us.[52]

[49] *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 1256.

[50] *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 641.

[51] *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 937.

[52] *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 792-93.

Numerous other verses from the *Adi Granth* similarly combine mercantile and divine imagery.[53] In addition to the different emphasis on mercantile imagery, a second distinction between Kabir and the Sikhs is worthy of comment. Although the poetry of both Kabir and the Sikhs vehemently denounces caste, Kabir was from a low-caste background, while the Sikh Gurus themselves were almost exclusively drawn from among the Khatri caste, a relatively high status group (associated with the *vaishya varna*) whose members were known for their traditional occupation as shopkeepers and small and mid-level traders. Furthermore, the families of the ten revered Gurus of early Sikh history all practiced endogamy, marrying exclusively within the Khatri caste. The dilemma raised by the Gurus' attitude and practices concerning caste has been carefully examined by McLeod in his essay "Caste in the Sikh Panth".[54] McLeod cites the numerous references to caste made by Nanak such as the following typical couplet:

> Observe the divine light in a man and ask not his caste
> For there is no caste in the hereafter.

Later Gurus continued in the same vein, with Guru Amar Das (r. 1552-74), for example, proclaiming:

> When you die you do not carry your caste with you.
> It is your deeds [and not your caste] which will
> determine your fate.[55]

---

[53] See e.g., *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 50-51, 289, vol. II, 876, 907, 933, 1200-05.

[54] *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, pp. 83-104.

[55] *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

The other Sikh Gurus condemned caste as well, and as noted above, the devotional poetry of low-caste *bhaktas* including Kabir and Ravidas was directly incorporated into the *Adi Granth*. Furthermore, at the end of the seventeenth century Guru Gobind Singh, the last of the ten revered Gurus, instituted the Khalsa brotherhood of Sikhs, establishing an initiation ritual which included drinking from a common bowl, while Khalsa members shared sacramental food, practices which disregarded caste taboos concerning religious pollution. Given these beliefs and practices, how is one to explain the exclusively Khatri background and marriage alliances of the ten Gurus? McLeod argues that caste organization should be understood in two distinct aspects. In the first case, caste relationships refer to the endogamous custom wherein families only marry within a single *jati* (Punjabi *zat*), a practice McLeod labels the horizontal observance of caste. The Gurus' marriage conventions, restricted to the Khatri *jati*, is of this type. The second kind of caste practice, the vertical dimension, sanctions forms of discrimination and exploitation based on a socio-religious hierarchy. It is this form, writes McLeod, that the Sikh scriptures repeatedly excoriate as morally and spiritually debased. In essence McLeod argues that because there existed a clear distinction between these two orders of caste, it was possible for the Sikh Gurus to accept one form while rejecting the other. He concludes that what the Sikh Gurus "were apparently concerned to deny was the justice of privilege or deprivation based upon notions of status and hierarchy. They were, in other words, opposed to the discriminatory aspects of the vertical relationship while continuing to accept the socially beneficial pattern of horizontal connections."[56] While McLeod does not identify what this pattern might be,

[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

it is clear that caste-based marriage conventions were in general intended to support and protect hereditary occupational pursuits, in this case, those concerning trade.

McLeod's analysis seems to resolve the apparent contradiction between the Gurus' beliefs and their actions concerning caste, but in separating caste into two sharply distinct and exclusive analytical and functional categories, the vertical and the horizontal, another crucial facet of the Sikhs' disposition toward caste, linking it to their attitude to the market, is obscured.

As already noted, the Gurus and a predominance of early Sikh converts were Khatris, a trading community, but also a relatively high caste. For such a group, one must identify what particular type of caste proscription would be objectionable. On a moral level, of course, a relatively high-caste group like the Khatris might find all forms of hereditary status distinctions abhorrent. At the same time, a traditionally mercantile community is likely to perceive as especially objectionable those social prohibitions involved in maintaining "vertical" hierarchies which impeded trade. This aspect of caste can be identified with Bougle's "singularization" process outlined above. While McLeod is not wrong to portray this feature of caste as underpinning a discriminatory hierarchy, it is important to recognize that it would in particular have presented a formidable hindrance to the Khatris' trading activities. Thus the Gurus' observance of specifically Khatri caste conventions, and their opposition to hierarchical caste discrimination can be seen to have been linked by a shared concern to promote a commercial livelihood.

The ability of Sikh devotionalism to overcome caste barriers against trade is illustrated in a *janam-sakhi* story entitled "The merchant and Raja Sivanabh."[57] Although the source of this particular story is taken from a compilation dated to 1733, the origins of *janam-sakhi* literature can be traced to written sources from the early seventeenth century, and to oral tradition dating back to the time of Guru Nanak. While clearly mythic in content, the popularity of *janam-sakhis* in Mughal era Punjab allows them to be taken, as noted by McLeod, as a useful source for reconstructing the cultural history of early Sikh tradition.[58] Indeed, as one recent historian has noted, the *janam-sakhis* "express the state of the Sikh Panth in the seventeenth century".[59] This particular story begins by relating the tale of Bhagirath, a poor Khatri who lacked the resources to marry off his daughter. Consequently he beseeches Guru Nanak in person for assistance. Nanak tells him to list what he needs for the wedding, and to then proceed to Lahore in order to acquire the goods. But Nanak specifies that Bhagirath must return that same day. Upon his arrival in Lahore, Bhagirath meets a merchant who promises to provide for all of his needs, but insists he wait a day for all of the items to be prepared. Bhagirath repeats Guru Nanak's command that he return immediately, and he convinces the unnamed merchant of Lahore to accompany him back to Nanak's presence. The Lahore merchant then realizes that Nanak is the great Guru, and becomes his devotee. He then stays with Nanak for three years, and compiles Nanak's sayings

[57] *The B40 Janam-Sakhi*, tr. and ed. by W. H. McLeod (Amritsar, 1980), pp. 155-61.

[58] *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, pp. 20-21.

[59] Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Oxford, 1994), p. 52.

into several volumes. The merchant next returns to Lahore, entrusts the goods of his shop to other traders there, and in order to undertake further trade, proceeds to sail to an unidentified country, where one Raja Sivanabh rules. Once settled there, the merchant follows the simple salvific rituals prescribed by Nanak, consisting of taking a cold bath at night, chanting Guru Nanak's name, reading a collection of Nanak's utterances, and singing Sikh devotional hymns. At this point the *janam-sakhi* writer contrasts the Sikh practices with misguided rituals prescribed by the Vedas. It is further observed that the merchant fails to follow the religion practiced by the inhabitants of the country, which consists of Hindu rituals including bathing after daybreak, fasting on certain holy days, icon-worship and visiting temples. The *janam-sakhi* declares: "The merchant, however, neither fasted nor worshipped idols, nor [did he observe] any of the customs [associated with] Amavas or Sunday. Any Hindu who went there was declared unclean by the people who live there, [and soon the people] began to murmur against the shopkeeper." Word soon reaches Raja Sivanabh, who summons the shopkeeper to explain such behavior from one who "has been born a Hindu". The merchant explains that through the grace of the true Guru he has already accomplished what fasting, religious customs and idol worship aspire to achieve, namely, salvation. The merchant then recites some sayings of Nanak, leading the king himself to become a believing Sikh. Finally the merchant says some words explaining the holy nature of Nanak, and the story ends noting, "having laden a ship the merchant sailed west from there."

Of particular interest in this tale is the linking of caste pollution with market activity, in its depiction of the Sikh merchant's shop as a source of pollution for Hindus.

As a practicing Sikh, the merchant rejects traditional brahminical-Hindu customs: he denies the authority of the Vedas, and neither worships icons nor visits temples. Furthermore, the tale highlights the merchant's use of a maritime vessel to conduct his trade, a typical activity for merchants which violated the brahminical caste taboo against sea travel. The implication is that the merchant's rejection of brahminical Hinduism will cause Hindus who patronize his shop to become "unclean". As far as the story is concerned, this difficulty is apparently resolved, not by the merchant's observance of brahminic customs, but rather by the conversion of the ruler to Sikhism. As a popular tale among Punjabis in the gradual process of conversion to the Sikh tradition, this *janam-sakhi* certainly would have served as an effective means of spreading a value system which legitimized commercial activity, in the process discounting brahminical caste taboos. Such an ideological message would appeal to those involved in trade, and would be completely compatible with the endogamy practiced by the Gurus and other Sikhs, a practice which itself would have allowed the Khatris to use their caste affiliation to facilitate the growth of trading networks.

The lesser-known writings of Mahamat Prannath provide an additional, salient example of devotionalist teaching which explicitly propagated commercial values related to buying and selling.[60] Prannath was born with the name Mehraj Thakur into a Kshatriya family in 1618 A.D. in Jamnagar, in the Kathiawad region of Gujarat. In his youth Prannath became a follower of a religious leader named Devchandra, himself of a mercantile Kayasth family. Devchandra belonged to the Radhavallabh *sampradaya*,

[60] The reasons for Prannath's relative obscurity, along with a more detailed examination of his life and movement, will be discussed in Chapter Three.

although he later came to be considered the founding guru of the distinct Prannami *sampradaya*. After studying under Devchandra until his teacher's death in 1655, Prannath set out on his own to both develop and popularize his religious movement. According to Prannath's religious biography, the *Bitak*, Prannath proceeded to travel throughout Gujarat, and to several major trading ports on the coast of the Arabian sea. The *Bitak* makes clear that Prannath developed a following from among individuals involved in commercial activity, ranging from modest shop-keepers to wealthy merchants. After returning to Gujarat he traveled throughout Western India, Rajasthan, and Delhi, and in 1678 attended the massive religious festival, the Kumbh Mela in Hardwar. In 1683 Prannath met and became the religious mentor of the Mughal mansabdar and sometime rebel, Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundela, and settled in Bundelkhand until his death in 1694.

In his frequent travels to various North Indian cities, Prannath was accompanied by an entourage of merchant-devotees. Prannath's followers provided accommodation for him in their homes, where large feasts were held, religious discourses were given, and devotional hymns were sung. Prannath also delivered public sermons, often in market places. The following verses, composed in the mid-seventeenth century, were explicitly directed to merchants (*sahukars*). Of particular interest, in addition to the repeated use of mercantile metaphors, are the lines which proclaim that a devotee, through hard labor, advances from being a worker to become an "owner":

> Traders of truth, deal in truth.
>
> ....

Here you get what you desire,
But the buyer must be a true examiner.

....

There are many hurdles in purchasing the true merchandise.
O wise jeweller, look calmly and carefully.

Whosoever is a true jeweller,
Will purchase things carefully and with a firm mind.
He will ignore the charming and attractive pieces,
And purchase the eternal commodity.

....

Here one pursues the truth and the other untruth.
Here the traders are tied to the tricks of their trade.
The market of this magic world is of such a nature,
That all are entangled in it.

....

There are many who increase their wealth a thousand fold,
And some lose their principal amount.
Some are entangled in worldly nets,
Others who move out of these nets, are called the best traders.

....

Such a capable trader need not come in the world again for business purposes,
He becomes a wealthy merchant.
From worker he becomes an owner,
Now he will enjoy eternal happiness in the Abode.

....

Who comes back in this perishable world,
After getting this eternal treasure?
O merchants (*sahukari*), if you trade in true merchandise,
You will definitely get that imperishable treasure.

....

This is the kind of market here,
Where you can purchase eternal truth in return for perishable things.
Here you can get the chance to have everlasting benefits,
Provided you follow good conduct.[61]

Textile production and devotional teachings

The devotionalist poetry and literature cited above testifies to the propagation of mercantile values in regard to economic exchange, primarily the business of buying and

[61] *Kirantan*, section 125, verses 3, 5, 10-11, 15, 17, 19, 21.

selling. Yet alongside this theme, a second, related but distinct focus within devotionalism appears in the compositions of the Mughal period. The manufacture of goods for the market, in particular crafts associated with the production of cloth and textiles, became a central theme and a rich source of metaphorical material in bhakti poetry at this time.[62] Kabir and Dadu Dayal, while extraordinary in their capacity as *sant*-poets, followed occupations which were heavily represented among followers of devotional traditions. Those who upheld the brahminical caste ideology held artisans in general in very low esteem, and allotted weavers, yarn producers, cotton-carders, cloth-dyers, and related occupational groups a position near the bottom of the caste hierarchy.[63] This fact has prompted some researchers to argue that the new wealth coming into the hands of urban artisans, itself due to economic growth induced by the state, fed aspirations for a corresponding increase in social status, a form of mobility denied these groups in the hereditary caste order.[64] These aspiring occupational groups therefore turned to devotional movements, which represented "open status groups" espousing egalitarian values rooted in a desire to reform, if not reject outright, caste

[62] Cotton textiles became the single most important commodity in Mughal India; for details about the production and market in this item see Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Non-Agricultural Production", *CEHI*, pp. 269ff.

[63] Neelam Chaudhary, *Labour in Mughal India* (New Delhi, 1998), p. 11; William Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Delhi, 1996).

[64] See e.g., Irfan Habib, "The Historical Background of the Popular Monotheistic Movement of the 15th-17th centuries", *Ideas in History*, Bisheshwar Prasad, ed., Bombay, 1969; Satish Chandra, "Historical Background to the rise of the Bhakti Movement in Northern India," reprinted in *Historiography, Religion and State in Medieval India*, (New Delhi, 1996 [1983]); Harbans Mukhia, *Perspectives on Medieval History*, ch. 4, "Ideology of the Bhakti Movement: The Case of Dadu Dayal" (Delhi, 1993); Eugenia Vanina's study of bhakti and sufi ideas proceeds from the presupposition, but does not argue the case, that developments in the economy and political realm was the driving force behind devotionalist movements; *Ideas and Society in India from the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Delhi, 1996).

hierarchy, in an effort to bring their socio-religious status into line with their de facto economic standing. As discussed in the previous chapter, the state was certainly fact a major factor contributing to commercial growth. The problem with the portrayal in the scholarship discussed above, however, is its dependency on a "base-superstructure" model of society, wherein devotionalist ideology appears as a mere reflection of these ostensibly more fundamental and antecedent political and economic shifts. Such a view overlooks the ways in which devotional movements sought to induce economic change by expanding the social sphere in which market forces, and craft production, were operative. Here an emphasis on the importance of ideas and ideology as causal factors in socio-economic development would prove useful.[65] From this perspective one can better understand the evolution in the use of poetic metaphors related to craft production, elucidating the role of bhakti in economic change.

Kabir's use of weaving metaphors represented a new thematic in North Indian religious writing, wherein the creation of symbolic associations between weaving and divine beings could serve to ennoble low-caste work. Thus in the following verse a weaver stands as a metaphor for the divine creator:

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[65] Such an approach is of course usually associated with Weberian theory. This should be distinguished, however, from Weber's own study of Indian devotionalism, where he examined the role devotionalism played in advancing the forces of a market economy and its opposition to the caste system, focusing on Vaishnavite sects with a "basis in the middle class burgher strata of Indian society." Unlike his theory of caste, his claims concerning devotional religion have not had a significant impact on subsequent scholarship on the subject, perhaps because these were based on a limited number of sources, and tend to dismiss bhakti as amounting to mere "orgiasticism". In essence, Weber argues that the trend toward a rational spiritual ethic apparent in the devotional movements was ultimately undermined by the nature of the leadership, whose authority, he thought, was based in hereditary charisma, not in rational selection, as was the case of institutions in European societies. He concludes that Indian devotionalism's supposed drive toward "not an active, inner-worldly asceticism but an inflaming of irrational holy-seeking" meant that Hinduism lacked any religious system capable of providing the basis for a rationalization of the socio-economic order. *The Religions of Indian*, pp. 306ff.

No one knows the secret of the weaver
Who spread his warp through the universe.
He dug two ditches, sky and earth,
Made two spools, sun and moon,
Filled his shuttle with a thousand threads,
And weaves till today: a difficult length!
Kabir says, they're joined by actions.
Good threads and bad,
That fellow weaves both. [66]

Yet in other places where Kabir makes references to the labor of weaving, he sounds a more ambivalent note, and at times even decries such work as an impediment to spiritual advancement:[67]

O King Ram!
When the old Woman came to get her thread –
He left home and went away
that Weaver.

Of nine yards, ten yards, nineteen yards,
he stretched the warp,
With seven threads, he tied the seventy knots:
what a big piece of cloth he made
....
Ceaselessly his Master bullied him
and he was prey to all miseries –
So, leaving at home his bundle of wet thread,
in anger He went away, that Weaver.

Worthless was his shuttle,
for ever getting entangled in the warp:
O Fools! Leave that cloth-weaving alone
and adore Ram –
Kabir warns you all![68]

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[66] Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh, *The Bijak of Kabir* (Delhi, 1983), p. 84; See also *sabda* 15, p. 48.

[67] Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir*, for an ambivalent use of this metaphor, see pp. 260-61.

[68] *Ibid.*, pp. 237-38; see also p. 209.

In the poetry of *bhaktas* writing after Kabir, spinning and weaving metaphors are cast in a different light. Such images become used more often in a literal sense, referring to the merit of the actual work being performed by the devotee, and the inculcation of a Protestant-like work ethic emerges as a distinct theme in the compositions of this period. This change occurred at a time when large numbers of people were emigrating from the countryside to seek employment in the growing urban centers of the Mughal empire, many becoming either full or part-time weavers or spinners. Virtually every major North Indian city, and many smaller urban centers, saw a significant increase in the number of resident artisans.[69] While the sources on population and occupation do not allow for dependable estimates for most of the Mughal period, during the eighteenth century those involved in textile production comprised approximately 20-30 percent of the total artisan population.[70] It was from among this migrant population that devotionalist movements gained numerous followers, and their concerns were addressed by many of the central teachings of bhakti poetry.

The following verses, from Prannath's *Shri Prakash*, are addressed to spinners of yarn, and represent an effort to encourage the artisans to focus on the future benefits of their labor. The poem clearly illustrates the use of spinning imagery to indicate to the listeners how to simultaneously attain spiritual merit and material wealth:

[69] Chaudhary, *Labour in Mughal India*, pp. 9ff; Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, pp. 144-51, 174-83; S. Chandra, "Some Aspects of Urbanisation in Medieval India", in I. Banga, *The City in Indian History* (New Delhi, 1994).

[70] Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, p. 144.

In order to chase away your sleep
I will give you an example.
Look at the manner in which others acted before you,
then you might understand the way.

They came with the hope of spinning,
and their hope continually grew.
Some of them spun fine thread,
[yet] others did not even card a roll of cotton.

The spinners came,
and tied each together.
Whoever spun fine thread
obtained the true love.
....
Those who spun fine thread with complete devotion,
and did not slacken for a moment;
they rose from among their fellow devotees,
with beaming smiles on their faces.

Whoever spun high quality thread
with humbleness;
They rose from among the homes of their fellow devotees,
and were garlanded with the wealth of spinning.

When the devotees looked at one another's thread,
then each person's skill was apparent.
But those who did not spin anything
hid their faces.
....
The one who moved the [spinning] wheel quickly,
with total commitment;
and even at night stayed awake working:
their hand obtained the yarn

But those who interrupted [work] with talk
did not spin well.
The cotton sat idly in their hands,
they sat daydreaming.
......
Whether one had coarse or fine [thread],
They fetched a price accordingly.
But those who did not spin,

got nothing.[71]

This is a clear example of what Weber would call "this-worldly asceticism", an exhortation to spinners to abjure anything which might lessen productivity, including sleep, conversation, and daydreaming. In addition to this emphasis, the last lines of the poem represent an attempt to instruct listeners on the price-mechanism of the market, wherein a finer product obtains a better price.

Such themes of time-consciousness and devotion to hard work, as well as reference to market value, appear in a similar fashion in the work of Shah Abdul Latif of Sind, who composed his devotional verse in early eighteenth century Sind.[72] Here I quote Shah Latif from a translation by Elsa Kazi:

> As long as you can spin, spin on,
> work season soon declines
> ....
> She [never] breaks thread, nor for rest pines
> who has realised the truth
> Wondrous devotion spinners have
> who tremble, spin and spin;
> For earning good, in spinning yarn
> at sunrise they begin –
> Such soul-beauty the connoisseurs
> even for themselves would win
> Yarn spun by spinners so genuine
> without weighing [it] they buy
> ....
> Oh fool! Your hands are like gold, why don't you spin with them?
> Do not shirk, [rather] sit in a corner and spin,
> So that you might happily exchange it (for money),

[71] *Shri Prakash Hindustani*, section 25, verses 4-6, 12-14, 16-17, 20.

[72] For an analysis of Shah Latif's life and writings, see S.M. Jhangiani, *Shah Abdul Latif and His Times (1690-1751)* (Delhi, 1987).

when the merchant calls on you.[73]

The explicit equation of the acquisition of wealth with spiritual worth revealed in the various devotional writings examined here might seem a paradoxical proposition to modern observers, and thus calls for some explanation. Much of modern thought indeed regards the focused pursuit of material gain as inimical to a spiritual vocation. Against this anachronism, however, one can recall Weber's study of the Protestant ethic – even if one disputes his ultimate conclusions – which provides ample evidence of the link between piety and economic activity that characterized Puritan thought and practice in early modern Europe. In the case of India, the perceived interdependence of spiritual and material pursuits was likewise in evidence, and was especially apparent in work activities related to textile production. Cloth was of course since ancient times an important Indian manufacture. But its centrality to the expanding economy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries caused this material to become an increasingly important and ubiquitous artifact, the significance of which was closely associated with the social transformation that accompanied economic growth. In the process cloth in Indian society came to possess a social significance greatly transcending its simple physical and economic properties. In an insightful examination of the meaning of cloth in pre-colonial South Asia, Chris Bayly notes that pre-colonial "Indian society spoke in the idiom of cloth, though idiom is really too weak a word since cloth could actually

[73] *Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif* (Hyderabad, 1965), pp. 168-71. Translation slightly amended for reasons of clarity.

transfer power and transform relationships."[74] The transfer of a degree of the king's authority to favored nobles through the ritual bestowal of robes of honor represents only what is perhaps the best known example of this phenomenon. Religious devotees frequently made ritual gifts of garments to holy men, and pieces of cloth or thread were commonly brought to sacred shrines and tombs, so that pilgrims could return home with a material receptacle containing the blessings received at the holy site. The production and exchange of textiles thereby served to establish and maintain a wide variety of relationships between groups and individuals, including bonds between rulers and subjects and between religious leaders and their followers. In such a role, woven fabric was perceived as being peculiarly capable of absorbing and conveying aspects of the people and beings with which it came into contact, so that, in Bayly's words, cloth functioned as a "bio-moral substance." From this perspective the literal and symbolic quality of any particular cloth was associated with the people who handled it, including the social standing of its producer. Weavers could therefore make an effort to produce "finer and purer commodities as a tactic for raising [their] status" within their profession.[75] The quality of the item produced by an artisan reflected the devotion which he or she directed to the work at hand. The references to "complete" and "wondrous" devotion to spinning in the poems cited above thus present a concept of devotion whose practice results in both spiritual and material gain. It is additionally notable that these poems explicitly proclaim that the superior product that results from

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[74] Reproduced in *The Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India*, (Oxford, 1998 [1986]), p. 190.

[75] "The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930", p. 183.

devotion to one's work will lead to socio-economic gain through the workings of the market. Such faith in the market to recompense the artisans' hard work certainly reflects the high demand for quality yarn and cloth which existed in Mughal India.

This chapter has argued that the brahminical caste system in Mughal North India presented a significant hindrance to the development of market activity through its prohibitions upon the social and material interactions inherent in large-scale economic exchange. But contrary to many studies of the Mughal economy, I do not see this as having been an insuperable barrier to market development. At the same time, the ideological resources necessary to overcome anti-market beliefs were not provided through state ideology, nor through traditional social organization and custom. Rather, expansive devotional religious movements developed original socio-religious beliefs and practices rooted in the types of livelihood practiced by the trader and artisan communities which supported and often led them. Not every devotional leader or movement of the Mughal period explicitly advocated commerce-related activity. Yet a significant strand of bhakti, represented through popular vernacular poetry - the central form through which devotionalist ideas were disseminated - used unambiguous metaphors of commerce and commodity production to envision a universe which would be intimately familiar to both traders and producers. In addition to this, the active propagation of devotional teaching served to extend the social ambit of commercial life and its values, thereby facilitating the growth of a market economy throughout Mughal India. Within the early poetry of Kabir trade and textile weaving appear as important devotional motifs, although his verse conveys an ambivalent attitude toward these

occupations. Kabir was a trenchant critic of his society, including the caste system, but his use of trade and weaving themes does not indicate that he perceived commercial activity as a means of social or economic advancement. In contrast, subsequent *bhakta*-poets employ these same motifs in a much more positive and literalist manner. For many Mughal era followers of bhakti religion, trade and textile production had become legitimate and even honorable avenues to both social and spiritual progress. Devotionalism thus asserted a correspondence between "this-worldly" and "other-worldly" achievement. This lack of differentiation of society into autonomous economic, political, and religious spheres in fact characterized pre- and early-modern societies generally, and in this regard India was no exception.[76] Mughal ideologues used an Islamic framework to condone but also to limit and subordinate the compass of trade, while brahminical Hinduism upheld a caste system hostile to commercial activity. The bhakti movement developed a system of belief which instead aggrandized the artisanal and commercial life, yet it too appropriated religious sanction for a preferred socio-economic order.

[76] Cf. Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, pp. 12ff; Peter van der Veer, "The Politics of Devotion to Lord Rama," in David Lorenzon (ed.), *Bhakti Religion in North India*, p. 288.

CHAPTER THREE

Devotional Sects, Mercantile Communities, and Pilgrimage Centers

Introduction

This chapter examines the devotional religious movements which played a role in providing a social and institutional structure for merchant communities and market expansion as these developed during the Mughal period. This will entail a discussion of the formation and function of religious "sects" (*sampradayas*, *panths*, *mats*, *margs*, etc.), and the growth of pilgrimage centers and religious festivals which served as significant marketplaces. Burgeoning devotionalist movements keenly competed with one another for potential merchant-followers, preaching their respective messages in bazaars and at popular religious fairs. As discussed in the previous chapter, devotionalism propagated an ideology hostile to caste restrictions, and contributed to market expansion through the promotion of commercial values. In this chapter I will examine how such teachings contributed to the coalescence of followers of devotional traditions into sectarian groups which served mercantile interests. I will discuss how devotional movements developed techniques and practices that allowed merchant-followers to conduct trade while either disregarding or negating the effects of ostensible caste pollution. In this process, religious authority was systematically appropriated by *bhakta* leaders at the expense of traditionalist brahman priests based in temples and supported by land grants, representing a class hostile to the socio-economic encroachments of markets and merchants. As an alternative to the localized and conservative religious authority of brahmans, organized sects provided a social

infrastructure which facilitated economic exchanges over long distances. Devotional movements further contributed to market growth through encouraging participation in inter-regional pilgrimages to popular assemblages which fulfilled both religious and economic functions. Massive religious fairs emerged during the Mughal period as significant arenas in which market exchange received socio-religious sanction through close association with hallowed sites and individuals. Pilgrimage centers also provided a locale for geographically distant communities to come together in a common spiritual and economic endeavor, thus facilitating the growth of social bonds across the Mughal territories.

In my examination of devotionalist sects I will focus upon a relatively little-studied group, the Nijdham *sampradaya*, and its most important leader, Mahamat Prannath (1618-1694). Prannath's movement spread first in the port cities of western India, from Thatta in Sind province down to the numerous trading centers of coastal Gujarat, later expanding into cities of the northern and central regions of India. This order initially developed as a sub-sect of the Vaishnavite *sampradaya* established by the itinerant preacher Vallabhacharya (1479-1531), but subsequently evolved into a separate sect, known as the Nijdham, centered on the figure of Prannath and his distinctive teachings. The Vallabha sect had garnered a substantial number of followers in the early sixteenth century, particularly from among *bania* trading groups of Western India. Vallabhacharya and his disciples had particular success in drawing devotees away from the prosperous Jain business community into the Vaishnavite fold. Before examining the growth of the Nijdham *sampradaya* I will therefore briefly discuss the

relation of the Jain and Vallabha traditions to devotionalism and commercialization.

Functioning as the focus of social networks and congregational activities, religious traditions of the Mughal period were well-suited to facilitate economic pursuits which required a high degree of coordination over both time and space, and emergent devotional movements in particular accommodated these organizational needs. The socio-economic functions of devotionalist associations contributed to a tendency to delineate and formalize individual devotional traditions, leading in turn to the growth of sectarian identities. The rapid proliferation of highly organized and formal sects spanned the gamut of devotional movements. Thus, as noted by John Hawley, "religious movements representing [the] Sant persuasion bear organizational patterns no less definite than their Vaishnava counterparts. The Dadu, Kabir, and Nanak (i.e. Sikh) panths are as well articulated as the Gaudiya, Vallabha, and Radhavallabha *sampradayas*."[1] The tendency toward sectarianism was further stimulated by the often intense competition among religious leaders for devotees from among the increasing number of individuals and groups involved in trade whose religious affiliations were often unsettled and in flux. The sectarian struggle to acquire such followers itself began to be conducted in a manner which exhibited a market dynamic. In this the religious competition in sixteenth and seventeenth century India mirrored developments in early modern Europe as discussed in Peter Berger's sociological study of religion, *The Sacred Canopy*. Certainly, the European context was distinct in that secular ideologies competed along with religious traditions for the

[1] J. Hawley, "The Sant in Surdas", in K. Schomer & W.H. McLeod, eds., *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, (Delhi, 1987), p. 192.

"allegiance of client populations" in producing "pluralistic situations". Nonetheless, the challenge which devotionalism in India presented to traditional orthodoxies, combined with the emergence of a religiously flexible, sizable and wealthy new mercantile class created a similarly competitive ideological environment. In this sense, Berger's claim that "The pluralistic situation is, above all, a market situation" can be applied to the Indian nexus between market dynamics and religious proselytization: "In [the pluralistic situation], the religious institutions become marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities. And at any rate a good deal of religious activity in this situation comes to be dominated by the logic of market economics."[2] This market logic appeared in the Indian instance in the form of novel religious practices and modes of preaching, and in public debates and critiques offered against religious opponents, both traditionalist and devotionalist. One consequence of this situation was the appearance, rapid proliferation and splintering of devotional sects in the seventeenth century.[3]

Jain sects and the Vallabha *sampradaya*

As the economy throughout the Mughal territories offered ever greater opportunities for trade, devotional movements adapted to the consequent social needs arising in varied regional contexts. In some cases, devotionalism provided existing mercantile communities with a legitimizing ideology that contributed to a more

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[2] *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, N.Y., 1967), p. 138.

[3] Hans Bakker, *Ayodhya* (Groningen, 1986), notes that Vaishnava organizations in North India during this century broke into numerous sectarian divisions p. 148; A.W. Entwistle *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* Groningen, 1987), mentions inter-religious conflict between various factions of the Radhavallabha *sampradaya* in the Mathura-Braj region, pp. 179-80.

assertive and expansive commercialization process. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Punjabi Khatris, for example, maintained commercially useful caste ties and practices, while adopting Sikh ideas which neutralized the socio-religiously polluting effects of market activity. A similar development can be seen in the growth of Vaishnavite sects in western and north-central India, such as the movement founded by Vallabhacharya, discussed below, which gained a large following among traders of the bania caste. Devotional movements also provided a basis for social ties, whether more or less formal, between different communities involved in commercial production and trade. Gatherings to listen to religious sermons, congregational hymn (*bhajan*) singing, and pilgrimage to popular religious fairs provided significant forums for developing inter-community bonds.

Devotional ideology also affected religious traditions which predated the early modern bhakti movements. This was perhaps most apparent in the thriving commercial ports of Gujarat, particularly among the Jains as well as the Shiite Bohra community, but was in evidence in other Mughal provinces as well. The Jain religion, for example, originating with the teachings of Mahavira (599-527 B.C.), and possessing a distinct identity and history from that of the bhakti traditions, nevertheless underwent some of the same developments which affected devotionalist movements during the Mughal period. The claim that devotional ideas were influential among Jains is consistent with recent scholarship which emphasizes that boundaries between Jains and "Hindu" communities should not be overstated.[4] Shared trends included efforts to establish a

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[4] See John E. Cort ed., *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Cultures in Indian History* (Albany,

more stable *modus vivendi* with Muslim rulers, the growth of "reformist" trends promoting iconoclasm, and the intensification of sectarian strife. The scholar of Jain history, P. S. Jaini, has compared one fifteenth-century reformist branch of Jainism to Lutheran Protestantism, even claiming that Jains were "the true forerunners of Indian iconoclastic movements" including Sikhism.[5]

In medieval India Jains were a famously wealthy business community whose importance in trade and banking far exceeded their relatively tiny number. Yet such economic prosperity co-existed with the Jain tradition's exaltation of an extremely strict asceticism practiced by its monks and nuns. James Laidlaw's recent book on Jain practice convincingly demonstrates from an anthropological point of view how contemporary renunciants are able to live in dynamic interaction with lay followers, negotiating a relationship which allows both groups to affirm the value of their respective occupational pursuits.[6] Historically, however, the difficulties involved in integrating lay followers interested in "worldly" economic pursuits into the religious community could lead to conflict and schism. At times, the growth of temples as centers of wealth and power accommodated the lay desire for authority and recognition, and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries such institutions were taken over by Jain

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1998); Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London, 1992), p. 6. The shared religious belief and practice between Jainism and the Vallabha sect has been commented upon by several authors. K. Schomer, "Introduction," in Schomer and McLeod, eds., *The Sants*, p. 8. For the parallels between the "sant" tradition and Jainism in matters of ritual and belief, see Charlotte Vaudeville, "Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal Path to Sanctity," in *ibid.*, p. 25. For a discussion of the adoption by sants and bhaktas of the poetic form earlier developed by Jains, see Karine Schomer, "The Doha as a Vehicle of Sant Teachings," in *ibid.*, pp. 65-67.

[5] Padmanabh S. Jaini, The Jain "Is There a Popular Jainism?", in P. S. Jaini, ed., *Collected Papers on Jaina Studies* (Delhi, 2000), p. 277.

[6] *Riches and Renunciation: Religion, Economy, and Society Among the Jains* (Oxford, 1995).

monk-priests. This was viewed as illegitimate religious innovation by tradition-minded renunciants, and led to reformist movements, particularly in the commercial centers of Gujarat as well as in Jaipur and Agra, which rejected temples, priestly intermediaries, and cultic images as intolerable corruptions.[7] These tensions were greatly aggravated by the interference and periodic harassment of Jains by Muslim political authorities.[8] In such circumstances, it is not surprising to find many wealthy individuals willing to shift their allegiance away from Jainism to one or another devotional tradition, a phenomenon apparent in the often fierce competition between devotional leaders and Jains to acquire or keep followers from merchant groups. Such redirecting of people's religious loyalties was, to be sure, not new in the religious history of India, as there had long existed competition between devotional orders to gain adherents. But the appearance of compelling new religious ideologies, combined with the periodic persecution, or threat of it, directed specifically against the Jains by the Mughals, played a significant part in motivating people to change sectarian allegiances in this period.

The Vaishnavite Vallabha *sampradaya*, named after its founder Vallabhacharya (1479-1531) and widely propagated by his immediate disciples, embarked upon one of the more successful attempts in the sixteenth century to convert and incorporate trading communities into an emergent devotional sect . Vallabhacharya was born and raised in the Andhra country of the South, and in his adult life spent decades traveling and preaching in the cities of northern and western India, gaining adherents from several

[7] Kendall W. Folkert, *Scripture and Community: Collected Essays on the Jains*, ed. by John E. Cort, (Atlanta, 1993), pp. 179-81; Jaini, *The Jain Path of Purification*, pp. 309-11.

[8] The relation between Jains and the Mughals is discussed in the next chapter.

merchant communities for his new teachings. In an article examining the growth of this sect, Richard Cohen notes that the doctrines espoused by Vallabhacharya represented a break with traditional, orthodox versions of Hinduism, and emphasized ritual practices that directly accommodated the socio-religious needs of merchants.[9] For example, Vallabhacharya promoted the idea that devotees could "purchase" Krishna's favor by making offerings to the deity. Vallabhacharya also addressed concerns about having contact with people and objects considered within orthodox Hinduism to be ritually impure, claiming that Krishna could rid a devotee of five distinct types of religious impurities, some of which "are particularly relevant to the merchant, especially the travelling merchant, who is in constant contact with potentially polluting sources."[10] Vallabhacharya's religious innovations further included the claim that Krishna could be incarnated in a compact representational image (*svarupa*, lit. "self-form"), that allowed for more mobility than the traditional temple-based icon known as *murti*. This change enabled devotional worship to occur in places including the spacious residences (*havelis*) of well-to-do merchants located in commercial towns.

Vallabhacharya's disciples continued to expand his *sampradaya* in western India, with six devotees in particular being credited with the dissemination of their *guru*'s teachings. Vallabhacharya and his disciples popularized the movement in the prominent trading towns of Gujarat and Rajasthan, including Surat, Cambay, Ahmadabad, Porbandar, Diu, Mathura, and elsewhere. In the course of the sixteenth

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[9] Richard J. Cohen, "Sectarian Vaishnavism: the Vallabha *Sampradaya*", in Peter Gaeffke and David A. Utz, eds., *Identity and Division in Cults and Sects in South Asia* (Philadelphia, 1984), p. 66.

century leaders of the sect successfully channeled immense resources from wealthy devotees into the construction of temples and other holy sites.[11] Temples devoted to Vishnu were also built in ports on the Persian Gulf and Red Sea which were home to bania diaspora communities.[12] Vallabhacharya's son Vitthalanath (1516-86) was especially effective in spreading the *sampradaya*'s influence, making numerous tours in Gujarat in order to preach to and initiate people, bania traders prominent among them, into the order. And in an effective innovation for proselytization, Vitthalanath organized traveling bands of dramatists to perform public religious plays.[13] Commenting on the high degree of success of the *sampradaya* in reaching out to merchant communities in particular, Cohen remarks that "There seems to have been a deliberate attempt, in the structuring of the sect's religious praxis, to cater to the world view of the Vaisya or the merchant interests. The relationship between the *sampradaya* and the mercantile groups, at the very least, must be a symbiotic one."[14] By the seventeenth century, in the trading centers of Gujarat, a significant number of banias were followers of Vaishnavite traditions, who were, in the words of Makrand Mehta, "operating as sharafs, shahukars, munims, brokers and merchants at the same time. They did not hold large capital like Virji Vora and Shantidas Zaveri, the Jain merchants.

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[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Sushil Kumar De, ed. and tr., *The Padyavali: An Anthology of Vaisnava Verses in Sanskrit* (Delhi, 1990 [1934]), Introduction, p. xli.

[12] Makrand Mehta, *Indian Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Historical Perspective* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 70-71.

[13] Bhai Manilal C. Parekh, *Shri Vallabhacharya: Life, Teachings and Movement*, 2nd ed. (Rajkot, 1969), p. 159.

[14] "Sectarian Vaishnavism: the Vallabha *Sampradaya*", p. 70.

But they possessed professional skills as accountants, brokers, and sharafs, and served as a backbone of brokers, and sharafs, and commercial transactions."[15] Vallabhite leaders also promulgated the Vrindavan-Mathura area near Agra as a major pilgrimage center for devotees.[16] Yet despite the accommodation with the socio-religious needs of traders, Vallabhacharya's *sampradaya* nevertheless retained Brahmanic notions of purity-pollution, evidenced by the focus on "purifying" rituals for merchants, by which followers could cleanse impurities of trade while still identifying "with a Brahmanic religious tradition embodied in the *persona* of Vallabhacharya."[17]

The success of the Vallabhite s*ampradaya* in gathering merchant followers was itself challenged in the seventeenth century with the appearance of a Mahamat Prannath and his followers, representing a devotional movement which developed a more thoroughgoing rejection of Brahminical norms, as well as a tendency to incorporate Islamic beliefs into its teachings. Prannath's *sampradaya* never attained the level of mass-following that other orders of his time did. Nevertheless, one can see developments parallel to other devotional movements, and discern a common type of relationship between the expansion of commercial communities and religious associations.

Mahamat Prannath and his *sampradaya*

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[15] Mehta, *Indian Merchants and Entrepreneurs*, p. 67.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 68

[17] Cohen, "Sectarian Vaishnavism", p. 70.

Mahamat Prannath, who can be considered one of the last important "*sant*" figures of the pre-colonial period, has been the subject of little critical scholarly study.[18] Prannath's work is not more widely known due to the fact that the primary sources written by Prannath and his followers have only in recent times been made available to scholars outside of the sect, the Nijdham *sampradaya.*[19] These sources consist of collections of Prannath's devotional poems and a number of hagiographies penned by members of the *sampradaya*. Similar to Sikh scriptures, manuscript copies of Nijdhami writings are revered as embodiments of the divine presence, and serve in a liturgical capacity in Nijdhami temples. In recent years members of the *sampradaya* have published the entire corpus of the writings of Prannath along with the major hagiography and religious biography of his life, the *Bitak.*[20]

A brief outline of Prannath's life, according to the *Bitak*, shows that he was born with the name Mehraj Thakur into a Kshatriya family, as the son of a local government minister (*diwan*) in 1618 A.D. in Jamnagar, a city located in the Kathiawad region of Gujarat. At the age of twelve Prannath became a follower of a religious leader named Devchandra, himself of a mercantile Kayasth family. Devchandra belonged to the

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[18] Members of the Prannami *sampradaya*, along with a few non-Prannami scholars have, however, published a number of articles and books on the collected works of Prannath and his hagiography. These publications are primarily written from the point of view of faithful devotees of the *sampradaya*. The Shri Prannath Mission in New Delhi publishes an annual journal, *Jagni* ("Awakening") of articles devoted to Prannath and his movement, written in this vein.

[19] The prefix "Nij" means true or real, while "dham" connotes both "supreme abode" and "place of pilgrimage". The concept of an eternal abode is central to Prannath's teaching. The sect is sometimes referred to as the Dhami, and contemporary sect members prefer the label Prannami. I primarily use the term Nijdham as this is the name commonly used in the *Bitak*.

[20] The term "*Bitak*", perhaps by design, is evocative of the *Bijak*, the name of the popular recension of Kabir's poetry. *Bitak* can be interpreted as a grammatically anomalous past participle of the Hindustani/Hindi verb "*bitna*", to come to pass, to happen, thus referring to the events of Prannath's life.

Radhavallabh *sampradaya*, but later came to be considered the founding *guru* of the distinct Nijdhami *sampradaya*. After studying under Devchandra until his teacher's death in 1655, Prannath set out on his own to both develop and popularize his religious movement. He spent several years traveling throughout Gujarat, and subsequently to several major trading ports on the coast of the Arabian sea, preaching his particular version of devotionalism, while steadily inducting a following of merchant-devotees into his *sampradaya*. In telling the story of Prannath's early life, the *Bitak* focuses on the unique religious message that he preached, as well as on the specific events contributing to the growth of Prannath's following. After returning to Gujarat he traveled throughout Western India, Rajasthan, and Delhi, and in 1678 attended the massive religious festival, the Kumbh Mela, in Hardwar. At this point the *Bitak* introduces a lengthy description of Prannath's ostensible attempts to gain an audience with the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in Delhi, in order to convey his religious message to the ruler. This effort to meet Aurangzeb is thematically central to the *Bitak* as a whole, and much space is devoted to a detailed narration of the events surrounding this undertaking. In 1683 Prannath met and became the religious mentor of Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundela (1649-1731), a warrior who oscillated between periods of imperial service as Mughal *mansabdar* and times of rebellion. Around the time of his first encounter with Chhatrasal, Prannath, in a remarkable metamorphosis, declared himself to be the messiah molded in the Ismaili Shiah tradition. In this role Prannath supported Chhatrasal's armed uprising against the Mughals, remaining in Bundelkhand until his

death in 1694. The final part of the *Bitak* prescribes the proper manner of Nijdhami worship, giving permanency to ritual practice for the sect's followers.

The *Bitak* as an historical source

Lal Das' *Bitak* represents the most authoritative religious biography of Mahamat Prannath.[21] The text was produced immediately after Prannath's death in 1694, and was presented to Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundela at his court. There are reportedly sixteen additional hagiographies of Prannath, although these were written after the *Bitak* was completed and all apparently used the *Bitak* as their main source of information. Matabadal Jayasawal compared several available manuscript copies of the *Bitak*, and in 1966 published what has become the standard edition of the text, with footnotes indicating differences between the various manuscripts, which are very minor.[22] The *Bitak* has subsequently been published by the Shri Prannami Mission in New Delhi in the original Khari Boli/Hindustani language, written in Devanagari script, with facing pages containing an interpretive translation (*tika*) in modern Hindi.[23] The text contains a total of 73 sections (*prakarans*) and 4,377 verses (*chaupais*).

In reading the *Bitak* as an historical source one is confronted with the problems and issues inherent in the critical analysis of hagiographical literature generally. Because the *Bitak* serves as virtually the only source, apart from Prannath's own

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[21] References to the *Bitak*, given in brackets, cite the section (*prakaran*) number followed by the verse (*chaupai*) number.

[22] *Anant Shri Swami Laldas Ji Pranit Bitak* ("The Eternal Swami Laldas' Composition, the *Bitak*"), (Bengal and Allahabad, 1966).

[23] *Mahamati Prannath Prerit Swami Laldas Virichit Bitak*, Smt. Vimla Mehta, ed., (New Delhi, 1991). All references are to this edition.

writings, for reconstructing the history of Prannath and his movement, it is particularly important to examine the nature and limitations of this work in a historiographical capacity. The study of the hagiographical genre from a historical point of view is well developed in the European case, but in South Asia represents a relatively neglected field of study.[24] The main difficulty with using hagiographical literature as a source for writing history is of course the mythical and legendary nature of much of the material. Writers of hagiographies by definition aim to present a thoroughly idealized and often supernatural portrait of the holy figure with whom they are concerned, in the process subjugating objective historical facts to this overall imperative. This basic fact, however, should not blind us to the widely divergent ways in which authentic historical information is embedded within distinct types of hagiographical literature. In other words, it needs to be recognized that some hagiographies are better in their presentation of genuine historical facts than others. In the case of South Asian religious literature, Bruce Lawrence has argued that a relatively high degree of historical facticity emerged from the sufi impact upon hagiographical traditions.[25] He claims that the *sant* movement in particular was heavily influenced by sufi religious biographies, *tazkhira*s, a genre which possessed "what can only be termed, in the Indian context, a scrupulous concern for factual accuracy."[26] The religious and ideological impact of sufism on Prannath and his *sampradaya* was profound, and there is good reason to believe that the

[24] See, however, Winand M. Callewaert & Rupert Snell, eds., *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India* (Wiesbaden, 1994).

[25] Lawrence differentiates between hagiographies, which he sees as basically mythical and legendary, and religious biographies, being more historical and fact-based.

[26] "The Sant Movement and North Indian Sufis", in Schomer and McLeod, *The Sants*, pp. 371; 363.

Bitak represents a clear example of a religious biography with a relatively high degree of historically sound information. In its portrayal of Prannath's life, the *Bitak* carefully records the leader's travel itinerary, paying close attention to the dating of significant events, naming the regions and towns visited by Prannath, and identifying individuals with whom he came into contact. Lal Das' accurate depiction of well known historical figures, including the emperor Aurangzeb and Maharaja Chhattrasal, lend his work additional credibility. Of course, as with any religious biography, care must be taken to try and separate the narration of mythical and miraculous occurrences from actual historical events. Yet the very fact that religiously significant scenes – most commonly, the description of individuals who experience sudden spiritual enlightenment in the presence of the *sant* – are described using hyperbolic language, makes it easier to distinguish dependable information from that which is less so.

The usefulness of hagiographical and religious works for writing history is however not limited merely to the extraction of objective facts from a given text. The ideas, observations, and beliefs expressed in hagiographies themselves provide historically useful information about the social context in which they were produced. Because the arena of religion was a key site in which social struggles were carried out in premodern South Asia (and premodern societies generally), the content of the ideas contained in a religious text can be a rich source for social history. And in the case of early-modern South Asia, the language itself - the vocabulary employed - reveals important aspects of the nature of specific religious movements. In my study of the *Bitak*, I use a combination of these approaches - mining the text for objective facts,

along with analyzing the social meaning of its message - in order to better understand socio-religious movements in early modern India.

Prannath's hagiographer, Lal Das, had been a wealthy merchant hailing from the trading center of Thatta, Sind, and became a follower only after losing his ships in a storm at sea. Lal Das's consequent close familiarity with trade makes him an exceptionally good source for understanding activities of the merchant communities from whom Prannath's movement drew its followers. Thus, in the *Bitak*, Lal Das uses precise terminology to indicate various commercial occupations of Prannath's followers, and furthermore displays a sensitivity for recording the often antagonistic relationship between Prannath's merchant-devotees and Mughal imperial officials. On one hand the *Bitak* fulfills a religious function similar to Prannath's own compositions, through its worshipful portrait of Prannath and focus on theistic and devotional themes. On the other hand, however, the text provides historical information virtually absent from Prannath's own poems, delineating the context in which Prannath lived and preached. Prannath's movement, seen through the eyes of Lal Das, was the most important influence in his devotees' economic, religious, political, and familial lives, and the hagiographer records perceptive observations on all these phenomena.

In composing the *Bitak*, Lal Das used the same form of verse, the *chaupai*, as did Prannath in his writings. The *chaupai* consists of a rhyming couplet, with each line containing a metrical pause approximately in the middle of the verse. In form, the individual *chaupai* resembles the *doha*, the more common vehicle of bhakti compositions, with some minor formal and stylistic differences. The *chaupai*, however,

is distinct from the *doha* in that whereas a single *doha* couplet generally possesses a self-contained meaning, each *chaupai* is usually part of a larger narrative whose meaning is only apparent when an entire section made up of numerous verses is heard or read.[27] Both types of verse were popularly used to convey heterodox religious sentiments, and in this regard drew upon a poetic heritage pre-dating the Mughal period that used the Apabhramsa dialect. The *sant* movement continued this tradition in the fifteenth century and after, with devotionalist poetry appearing in regional languages and dialects, proclaiming beliefs and practices antagonistic to dominant orthodox religious systems. The rhymed cadences of these poems allowed them to typically be put to a melody and sung aloud in congregations, thereby serving to disseminate sectarian teachings and to provide a context for developing group identity and cohesion.

The evolution of Prannath's teachings

Although Prannath's personality, ideas, and poetic compositions have represented the central focus for devotees of the Nijdhami sect, it is his *guru* Devchandra (1581-1655) who is considered the founder of the *sampradaya*. Accompanying his father on a business journey to Kuchh, Gujarat, as a young man, Devchandra accepted one Haridas Gosain, a *bhakta* of the Radhavallabh order (a branch of the Vallabha sect which focused on the god Krishna in his child-form), as his *guru*. As a Vaishnavite *bhakta*, Devchandra gave particular emphasis to the worship of Krishna and the teachings of one of the foundational works of the bhakti movement, the

[27] The best discussion of the *doha* in bhakti poetry is Karine Schomer, "The *Doha* as a Vehicle of Sant Teachings", in Schomer and McLeod, eds., *The* Sants, pp. 61-90.

Bhagawat Purana, although he also venerated other Puranas, the Upanishads, and the Vedas as important sources of scripture.

Prannath's older brother, Govardhan, a disciple of Devchandra, introduced Prannath to his preceptor, and at the age of thirteen Prannath received initiation from Devchandra.[28] Devchandra selected Prannath from among his followers as his leading disciple, proclaiming him to be an incarnation of the deity Indravati. Devchandra also ordered Prannath in 1646 to sail to the "Arab" lands to assist one Gangabhai and his brother Khetabhai in their commercial enterprise. Prannath arrived after fourteen days at sea, and was given charge of Khetabhai's business (*karbhar*) and storehouse (*bakhar*), telling Khetabhai to return to Jamnagar to meet with Devchandra.[29] Prannath subsequently traveled to other unnamed ports, assisting devotees of Devchandra in their business enterprises, and remained in the Persian Gulf area for approximately four years before returning to Gujarat.[30] Prannath then again met with Devchandra, saying that he handed over his "worldly" (*laukik*) work in the Arab lands to others so as to be able to meet with his beloved guru. Devchandra replied that Prannath was not to resume his worldly work, but rather would set out to do the "work of Islam."[31] Prior to his death in 1655, Devchandra appointed Prannath as head of the new *sampradaya*. In spite of his new role as spiritual leader, Prannath temporarily assumed a ministerial post

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[28] *Bitak*, *pr.* 14.

[29] *Ibid.*, *pr.* 15, *ch.* 7.

[30] *Ibid.*, *pr.* 15, *ch.* 10.

[31] *Ibid.*, pr. 15, *chs*. 1-6.

(*diwangiri*)for the petty kingdom of Jamnagar.[32] Around this time Prannath also married a woman by the name of Phul Baiji, who was to accompany him throughout his life during his proselytizing missions.

In order to pursue his calling as a devotional leaders, Prannath gave up his ministerial post and began to compose original bhakti poems. In the course of his life Prannath was to compose nearly 19,000 devotionalist verses, which were eventually gathered as fourteen volumes, collectively known as either the *Tartam Sagar* ("The Ocean of Transcendent Knowledge") or *Kulzam Swarup* ("The Complete Incorporation of the Self-Form"), edited by his disciple Keshavdas at the time of Prannath's death in 1694. The titles of the individual works are *Ras*, *Sindhi Vani*, *Kalash*, *Prakash*, *Sanandh*, *Kirantan*, *Khulasa*, *Khilwat*, *Sagar*, *Parikrama*, *Shatruti*, *Singar*, *Marphat Sagar*, and *Kayamatnama* (*Chota* and *Bara*).[33] Like numerous other itinerant devotionalist poets of the Mughal period, Prannath composed his verses in a variety of North Indian vernaculars, enabling him to reach listeners from varied linguistic communities resident in geographically dispersed cities and towns, a purpose to which the relative accessibility of the *chaupai* form was well-suited. Prannath's earliest compositions (*Prakash*, *Shatruti, Kalash,* sections of *Ras*) appeared in Gujarati, one text was composed in Sindhi (*Sindhi Vani*), with the remainder of his works being written in variants of Hindustani, Khari Boli, or Braj Bhasha. Two works, *Kalash* and *Prakash*,

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[32] *Ibid.*, pr. 18, *ch.* 67.

[33] See Mishrilal Shastri, "*Prannami Sahitya: Adhyatmik Prishtbhumi*" ("Prannami Literature: the Spiritual Background") for a brief analysis and discussion of each volume's religious themes, language, number of verses, and place and year of composition; *Mahamati Prannath Jagni Sanchayan* (New Delhi, 1994-95), pp. 284-297.

which were originally composed in Gujarati, were translated, with Prannath's oversight, into Hindustani. As a whole the *Kulzam Swarup* reveals the influence of the *sant* tradition, bhakti ideology (especially the *nirguna* strand), Vaishnavism, Sufism, and finally an apocalyptic strain of Ismaili Shi'ism. With only one exception (*Kirantan*), each volume represents a set of verses spoken by Prannath within a period of approximately one to two years, which were immediately transcribed and compiled by a select group of devotees. This process contributed to the high degree of thematic unity possessed by each individual volume.

While Prannath's teachings clearly reflect the ideas of various popular North Indian devotionalist traditions, the trajectory of his religious evolution is unparalled in the history of North Indian devotionalism. Prannath's publicly conducted religious discourses (*charchas*) based on his poetic compositions, and his frequent engagement with proponents of the sects of Kabir, Nanak, and Vallabhacharya emerge as an important theme in the sections of the *Bitak* which deal with Prannath's early years as a preacher. The *Bitak*'s narration of these scenes typically (although not always) concludes with a description of the listeners' acknowledgement of Prannath's superior spiritual insight, and the listeners' consequent "recognition" (*pehchanna*) of his divinity. Prannath's compositions can be broadly categorized according to the primary themes and language used in each collection. In these works one can see that as Prannath's thinking developed, he began to make a self-conscious attempt to build a new and increasingly radical religious movement by bringing together elements of several religious traditions then prevalent in North India. Prannath's religious beliefs

can be seen to have passed through three fairly distinct stages. His earliest compositions reveal that he initially remained firmly within the Vaishnavite tradition, with his sermons exhorting devotees to commit themselves more fully to Vallabhacharya's teachings. Prannath's first collections – *Ras*, *Prakash*, and *Shatruti*, which first appeared in 1658 – were composed in Jamnagar, and deal with Krishna-centered bhakti themes which were commonplace by the early seventeenth century.[34] These works fall within the well-known *viraha* genre, emphasizing emotionality and the longing of the devotee for a remote or absent deity. The illusory nature of earthly life (*maya*) is contrasted with the beatific states awaiting the ardent devotee upon reunion with the Beloved. This poetry extols the Braj-Mathura region as the holy land into which Krishna descended as an *avatar* of god, thus encouraging listeners to make a pilgrimage to this area. The *sant* theme which emphasizes the importance of the "true spiritual guide" (*satguru*), here in the form of Devchandra, is also central to these early writings of Prannath. These works contain repeated references to the importance of a proper understanding of the *Bhagawat Purana* and the Vedas, a focus which harmonizes with the Vallabhite adoption of a Brahminical traditionalism reformed to accommodate the commercial lifestyle. Prannath followed the ancient practice of ending verses with a signature line, known as *bhanita*, using in *Ras* and *Shatruti* the self appellation "Indravati," indicating his status as an incarnation of a Hindu deity.[35]

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[34] Sections of *Kirantan* also were likely composed in this early period.

[35] For a discussion of *bhanita* in devotionalist poetry, see Charlotte Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir: Selected Verses With a Detailed Biographical and Historical Introduction* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 124-25.

After composing his early collections of verse, Prannath began a series of journeys to propagate his teachings. From 1659 to 1661 he preached his Vaishnavite beliefs in Jamnagar in Gujarat, proclaiming a devotionalist message that persuaded a number of merchants to accept him as their religious leader. Prannath then visited many of the trading ports of the Indian Ocean, in order to gain adherents to his *sampradaya*. Travelling by means of the merchant ships of his followers, Prannath actively preached and proselytized in trade centers including Thatta, Basra, Muskat, Abbasi Bandar, Kog, Navi, and Surat. While Prannath articulated his religious ideas in Arab ports, the *Bitak* conveys the sense that he did so only among Indian communities, not for the general populace. He later traveled by land to Burhanpur, Ujjain, Udaipur and many other inland towns. In 1669 he returned to the major commercial center Thatta, Sind, and gave religious discourses (*charchas*) to large crowds, debating with sadhus and a follower of Kabir, before departing the city. When Prannath later returned for a more extended stay in Thatta, one Lakshman Das, the future Lal Das, Prannath's hagiographer, heard his religious discourses on various topics including the story of Krishna at Braj, the meaning of the *Bhagvad Gita* and *Bhagvat Purana*, and became a devotee.[36] In a typical occurrence, during a visit to Lathibandar, Prannath stayed in the store (*dukan*) of his devotee Devebhai, and met with Vishvanath Bhatt who "recognized" the divinity of the leader. Numerous others who were exposed to his sermons also became followers of Prannath, including a broker (*dallal*), an Ayurvedic doctor, and several Vallabhites. Other members of the Vallabha *marg*, hearing of

[36] *Bitak, pr.* 22, *chs.* 1-47.

Prannath's successful discourses, came in order to argue, and residents heaped abuse upon Prannath, who nevertheless remained in Thatta for ten months. When the monsoons allowed, Prannath departed by sea from Thatta for Muskat, halting in Lathibandar *en route*.[37] In Muskat he stayed at the store of one Mahavji, where many devotees arrived to share information about each other's lives and circumstances, to feast together, and to hear the religious discourses of Prannath. Mahavji subsequently became a disciple of Prannath, then had second thoughts and recanted, apparently under pressure from family members who opposed the presence of Prannath in an Arab land, but then again strengthened his resolve and became a committed member of the Nijdhamis. A number of men and women also joined the order in Muskat, including a rich man (*lakhpat*), a business agent (*kamdar*), and others of unspecified occupation.

Prannath left Muskat for Abbas Bandar in 1671.[38] In Abbas Bandar Prannath encountered two men from Multan who were disciples (*chela*s) of Guru Nanak and carried with them a book (*pothi*) of Kabir's verses, whose meaning they failed to understand. Upon hearing Prannath's explanation of the poem's significance, the two became devotees.[39] The *Bitak* also recounts how some women, wives of local residents, attended Prannath's discourses against the wishes of their husbands. These women explained that because Prannath was the first person who had come to give this kind of religious talk in the Arab port, they should accept him as a blessing. A leading woman of the Indian community, Tejbai, took up their cause, and consequently the resistance to

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[37] *Ibid*., *pr*. 25, *ch*s. 17-31.

[38] *Ibid*., *pr*. 26, *ch*s. 1-50.

the women's participation was brought to an end. The names of several men and women who then joined the sect are listed in the *Bitak*.[40] After a few months, Prannath requested leave to continue his missionary activity, and, providing him with clothing, ornaments and money, the devotees saw him off. Prannath proceeded to visit Kog Bandar, Lathi Bandar, and Thatta, where the *Bitak* again provides a list of names of people who joined the order. Prannath at this time also maintained regular communication with his followers in various cities by writing and receiving letters.

Hearing of his return to Gujarat, devotees from nearby cities gathered in Surat to meet with Prannath in 1671, where he spent seventeen months. According to the *Bitak*, some followers of the Vallabha *marg* prepared a set of questions in order to ascertain the extent of Prannath's learning. These questions were presented to Prannath by a Vallabhite *dallal*, who acknowledged the correctness of the *guru*'s answers and consequently entered the order. Other Vallabhites, however, continued to complain that some of their members (*sevak*s) were attending Prannath's lectures. Renunciants of the "Vithaleshwar" sect also began to make accusations against the new sect. One follower of Prannath at this time attempted to restrict low caste (*nich jat*) persons as well as prostitutes from hearing the teachings of Prannath. Prannath, however, rejected this admonition, noting that a Muslim prostitute had already received his blessing, and asserted that among those who accept his teachings caste distinctions are not to be observed. During his stay in Surat, Prannath added verses to his work *Kalash*. The

[39] *Ibid.*, *pr.* 27, *chs.* 16-18.

[40] In addition to references to people who "recognize" the divine nature of Prannath, those who become his followers are variously described in the Bitak as having "entered" "Nijdham" and "Islam." Sect

establishment of a community of Prannath's devotees in Jamnagar and Surat around this time allowed these to cities to become spiritual centers of the *sampradaya*. The impression given by the *Bitak* is that Prannath brought a large number of traders into the Nijdham fold during his seventeen years of travelling and preaching in western India, between 1655 and 1672. In his extensive travels to the port towns of the Arabian Sea, Prannath did not move about on his own, beg for food, and lodge in hospices, as is typical among religious renunciants, but rather traveled with an entourage of followers, relying upon an infrastructure maintained by devotees for commercial purposes. Thus Prannath was transported in seafaring ships, lodged in the shops and stores of devotees, and was provided by them with food, clothing, and money. Prannath also maintained lines of communication with his followers located in disparate towns and cities by frequent letter-writing.

Prannath's religious thought entered a second phase around 1672, when his focus shifted from efforts to build up a core group of devotees to a concern with the emperor Aurangzeb. At this time Prannath began to travel to towns located inland from coastal Gujarat, and he engaged with the sufi tradition. By this point in his life, Prannath had successfully gathered around him a devoted following of mercantile and business families, primarily of Gujarati origin. In this next stage of his life, Prannath acted as an established religious leader and, while he continued to proselytize for his sect, turned his attention to the Mughal state and its impact on Indian society. The first 32 *prakarans* of the *Bitak*, which cover the early decades of Prannath's life, only

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members are titled, variously, "*saths*" and "*momins*".

occasionally hint at conflict with the Mughal authorities and the emperor Aurangzeb. Mention is made of "disturbances" caused by the "*dajjal*", the Islamic anti-Christ, which, in subsequent sections of the *Bitak*, is identified as Aurangzeb himself. *Prakaran* 33 of the *Bitak* describes an event which signals a transition in Prannath's thought, and moves Prannath's attitude toward Aurangzeb to the center of his hagiography's narrative. After relating various daily happenings among the sect's followers and identifying new members, several references are made to an unspecified "commotion" being raised by the *dajjal*.[41] Prannath, during a stay in the town of Merta, Rajasthan, one day hears a mulla announcing the call to prayer from the local mosque, causing Prannath to reflect, identifying the God of Islam with that of Hindu tradition:

> "The *kalama* came from above: *La illah illallah,*
> *Muhammad Rasul Allah*; this is the word of Allah."
>
> "La" means "no" in this saying, "ilah" is God [*haq*]
> The imperishable supreme being [*akshar achharatit*]; this is the word of the great one"[42]

The next section of the *Bitak* begins with Lal Das noting that prior to this time he had been unfamiliar with the teachings of the Quran, and requests that Prannath now explain its meaning. Prannath says that he will indeed explain the Quran of "Shri Muhammad", and immediately proceeds to claim that Jesus and Muhammad have come together to quickly destroy the *dajjal*. Prannath tells Lal Das that the "Sultan" must now be given an invitation to join the true faith (*iman*). To this end, Prannath and his

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[41] *Ibid., pr.* 33, *chs.* 33, 40, 49.

[42] *Ibid., pr.* 33-34, *ch.* 70.

followers set off for Delhi, but not before visiting the Braj-Mathura region as well as Agra.[43] Upon arrival in Delhi, the group met with additional followers arriving from Thatta, and began to devise a plan to arrange a meeting with the emperor. The *Bitak*'s portrayal of Prannath's changing attitude toward Aurangzeb will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, but I introduce the subject here because this development contributed to a profound shift in Prannath's thought and writing. Most notably, in the works of Prannath produced in this period, there appears a significant level of sufi ideas and terminology.[44] These compositions thematically overlap with the poems of his first stage in focusing on the anguished separation of the devotee from the Beloved. However, the language and imagery change, with Arabic and Persian vocabulary, largely absent from his earlier writings, appearing throughout these poems. The sufi concept for the devotional love of God, *ishq*, is employed in a manner which echoes the *viraha* motif of Prannath's earlier writings.[45] In *Khilvat* and subsequent texts, Devchandra is referred to as "*Ruh Allah,*" the "Soul of Allah," indicating that Prannath now viewed his *guru* as a mystical Islamic presence. Prannath also introduced into his work the sufi concepts of *fana* and *baqa*, representing the elimination of the ego in order to dwell in the presence of God, as well as sufi cosmological notions. In addition to references to the Vedas and Puranas, in these writings Prannath frequently refers to verses from the Quran. However, his invocation of Qur'anic authority is carried out

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[43] *Ibid.*, 34/9-10.

[44] See Appendix.

[45] See Appendix.

within a sufi framework, with Prannath emphasizing his ability to extract the Quran's esoteric meaning (*batin*).

Sufi exegetical practices also affected Prannath's own style of composition, as his poems began to frequently employ religious terms which were liable to be interpreted in more than one way. This was apparent in the introduction into his verses of an original self-appellation, "Mahamat," a name which he used alternately with "Indravati" in *Prakash*, but which replaced the latter name altogether in *Kalash*. In one reading, *mahamat* can be taken to mean the "great doctrine" or "supreme religion" through its combination of the Hindustani prefix "*maha*", meaning great or supreme, with the term '*mat*', which connotes a religious sect, doctrine, or system of belief, thus overlapping with the English term 'religion'. As Prannath's teaching developed so as to incorporate several traditions and various scriptures, this name conveyed a religion which would encompass and transcend the major sects and faiths of India. In a second sense, "Mahamat" can be understood as near-homonymous with the name Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, and projects a shift in identity which set the stage for Prannath's final, messianic stage of activity. This usage was to gain significance in reference to a popular *hadith* which likely circulated in medieval Gujarat, when Prannath later sought to be recognized as the "Imam Mehdi", the Shiah messiah. The *hadith* in question proclaims: "The Messenger of God said: 'The earth will be filled with injustice and crime. When it is filled with injustice and crime, God will send a man from me whose name will be my name".[46] Thus with the

[46] Cited in Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Agra, 1965), pp. 69-70.

designation Mahamat, Prannath could lay claim to the man prophesied in this *hadith*. Even before declaring himself the *mahdi*, however, Prannath continued to sharpen his criticism of Aurangzeb and the Mughals, accusing them of fostering a misguided religious policy in the name of Islam. Prannath also continued in this period to frequently travel with his devotees, visiting numerous cities including Delhi, Burhanpur, Merta, and Aurangabad.

In the *Bitak*'s narrative, Prannath's metamorphosis into the *mahdi* – representing the third and final stage of his religious evolution - was precipitated by Aurangzeb's refusal to acknowledge the correctness of Prannath's interpretation of Islamic tradition. The emperor's purported obstinacy led Prannath to radically change his approach to the issue, and he abandoned his attempts at persuasion in favor of support for armed rebellion against the Mughals. This dramatic change coincided with Prannath's encounter and involvement with the politically aspiring Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundela of Bundelkhand.[47] A disciple arranged a meeting between Prannath and Chhatrasal in 1683, at which time the king became a disciple of Prannath's. In 1671 Chhatrasal had begun a militarily uprising against Mughal rule in Bundelkhand, and Prannath lent his support to Chhatrasal's rebellious activity. Prannath's condemnation of Aurangzeb as the *dajjal* provided ideological justification for Chhatrasal's military resistance, and at the king's request Prannath was even to ride on an elephant at the head of the army.[48]

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[47] Prannath's relationship with Chhatrasal is discussed at length in *prakaran* 60. In the early 1680's a man from Bundelkhand had arrived in Delhi and became Prannath's disciple, *Ibid.*, *pr*. 43, *ch*. 11.

[48] *Ibid.*, *pr*. 60, *chs*. 148-150.

Prannath's apocalyptic proclamations are contained in his final two works, *Kayamatnama* ("Book of the Day of Judgment"), and *Marphat Sagar* ("The Ocean of Knowledge"). These books, written in Bundelkhand, declare Prannath to be the "Imam Mehdi," are marked by a heavy use of Perso-Arabic terminology, and are based on sufi as well as millenarian Shi'a ideas. These works reveal Prannath's familiarity with messianic Ismaili thought, a set of beliefs which thrived in medieval India, and was particularly strong in Gujarat and Sind. Themes central to Prannath's messianic poetry, including the appearance of an *imam mahdi* and the *dajjal* in the end times, the mingling of Vaishnavite and sufi imagery, and the concern with Judgment Day bear a close resemblance to the Ismaili Nizari *ginan* tradition.[49] Furthermore, previously men claiming to be the *mahdi* had periodically appeared in Sultanate and Mughal India, each having achieved varying degrees of popularity. The movement of Saiyid Muhammad Jaunpuri (1443-1505), known as the Mahdawi, was particularly successful in Gujarat, and had established a center in Ahmadabad, which was sustained by Saiyid Muhammad's descendants.[50] The temples of the Nijdhami *sampradaya* in Panna and Ahmadabad are to this day crowned with a *panja*, the open-hand symbol of Shi'ism.

Prannath's merchant-disciples remained faithful to their leader even as he underwent such a radical religious transformation. A number of Prannath's devotees accompanied him to Bundelkhand and settled with him in Chhatrasal's capital, Panna. The *Bitak* notes that local disciples as well as those from overseas (*pardes*) came to

[49] See D. S. Khan; Tazim R. Kassam, *Songs of Wisdom and Circle of Dance: Hymns of the Satpanth Isma'ili Muslim Saint, Pir Shams* (New York, 1995).

[50] Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements*, chs. 2-3.

serve Prannath in his new home, and Panna thus became a main center of pilgrimage for devotees of the *sampradaya*.[51] The Nijdhamis settled in various cities of the empire and beyond, maintained ties with one another, and those who continued to live outside of Bundelkhand continued to support Prannath. In response to questioning from Chhatrasal about the source of his financial support, Prannath revealed that followers based in Merta, Rajasthan, continued to supply him with funds.[52] Furthermore, Prannath, and later Lal Das, repeatedly encouraged devotees to undertake pilgrimages to Surat (which to this day is an important center of pilgrimage in the order).

Pilgrimage centers and marketplaces

In ideology, ritual, and organizational form, sectarian associations such as the Nijdhamis, Vallabhites, Sikhs and others provided religious systems which were highly congenial to the socio-cultural needs of groups involved in the commercial economy. However, important as these groups were for the development of commercial exchange, the impact of devotional movements was not limited to such relatively well-defined organizations alone. The broader role which devotionalism played in the Indian economy was particularly apparent in the conspicuous growth of popular pilgrimage centers, as a brief examination of several such sites during the Mughal period will illustrate. *Bhakta* and *sant* preachers promoted pilgrimage to specific sacred sites, and competed with one another at such places to convince audiences of the righteousness of their respective teachings. Devotees flocked to these centers in large numbers and often

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[51] *Bitak*, *pr.* 60, *ch.* 147.

[52] *Ibid.*, *pr.* 60, *chs.* 135-145.

from long distances, but not only to hear religious sermons and seek spiritual benefit: the opportunity to buy and sell was a central element of the pilgrimage experience in Mughal India. The economic incentive for this activity should not be seen, though, as conflicting with the spiritual goals of pilgrims. Indeed, not only was there no inherent contradiction between the religious and economic roles of holy sites, but the two functions powerfully reinforced one another as a routine matter.[53] The observations of the French Indologist Garcin De Tassy concerning Indian religious fairs, while made in the early nineteenth century, depict practices which undoubtedly similarly characterized the burgeoning pilgrimage centers of the Mughal period: "A *mela* is not exactly our fair. This is the name given to the gathering of pilgrims and merchants drawn by devotion or monetary interest and often for both, to the place considered sacred, on the occasion of the fetes of some Indian gods in the case of the Hindus, and of certain Muslims who are considered saints. In order to meet the demands of the multitude gathered there, merchants set up shops. Thus the word *mela*, fair, is often mixed up with pilgrimage, *ziyarat*, among the Muslims and *tirath* among the Hindus."[54]

Pilgrimage towns provided for a main prerequisite of large-scale, organized trade, the existence of an appropriate physical space in which goods can be bought and sold. A dynamic market requires that buyers and sellers gather in market places in

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[53] Sunita Puri observes that "It is an important historical and sociological phenomenon that the emergence of great centres of religious activity is very often accompanied by the growth of trade and commerce." *Advent of Sikh Religion: A Socio-Political Perspective*, New Delhi, 1993, p. 171. See also J.G. Lochtefeld, *Haridwara, Haradwara, Gangadwara: The Construction of Identity and Meaning in a Hindu Pilgrimage Place* (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1992).

[54] *Muslim Festivals in India and Other Essays*, ed. & tr. M. Waseem, (Delhi, 1995), p. 42.

sufficient numbers in order to create conditions of competition, thereby allowing price to be determined by largely autonomous supply and demand factors. In premodern South Asia, market places took the form of both permanent urban and semi-urban sites, as well as seasonal centers for exchange. Mughal era devotional movements helped to create and evolve market places through the promotion of pilgrimage centers and festival sites, which had, as remarked by De Tassy, in addition to their obvious religious elements, important social and economic functions. As sites of economic exchange, pilgrimage centers accommodated a considerable amount of trade, although the sources do not provide the type of data that would allow even an approximate estimate of the actual quantity of goods sold. This economic aspect of holy sites has not gone unnoticed by historians, although when acknowledged it is often viewed as a secondary, less significant adjunct to the "real" (i.e. spiritual) purpose of the gathering of the faithful. In studies of the Indian economy, as noted by Chris Bayly, "The economic role of temples in south India has long been recognised, but the importance of patterns of pilgrimage and religious practice in tying the Indian economy together at a wider level has not been appreciated."[55]

The expansion of religiously and economically significant sites was part of a broader process of the growth of population centers. The period of the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) witnessed a steady increase in the number and size of urban centers in North India. However, in the Mughal period urbanization attained an altogether higher level of growth, with cities and towns becoming spread more evenly across the imperial

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[55] C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 143.

territories. In his study of towns and cities in Mughal India, Gavin Hambly writes that the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century "appears to have been a veritable golden age of urbanization, at least for much of northern and central India."[56] In particular, Hambly singles out both big port cities and the western and central areas of the Gangetic plain as having experienced a high degree of urbanization during the seventeenth century. The author relates this growth to the establishment of political conditions under the Mughals which were favorable to the rapid expansion of commerce, particularly the manufacture and trade in textiles. In addition to this quantitative expansion, other authors have noted that there was also a qualitative dimension to the transformation of urban settlements in the Mughal period. This was due to the new centrality of commodity production and trade in urban life, as markets became a conspicuous new element of towns of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, linking urban centers to one another and to the countryside more tightly.[57] Finally, a large section of the new urban population was composed of a swelling number of traders, shopkeepers, and practitioners of "industrial crafts," particularly artisans involved in the production of cloth.[58] These groups constituted a major segment of the growing devotionalist movement.

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[56] *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Volume I, c. 1200-1750*, Cambridge, 1982, p. 436.

[57] See Satish Chandra, "Some Aspects of Urbanisation in Medieval India" and J.S. Grewal, "Historical Writing on Urbanisation in Medieval India", in Indu Banga, ed., *The City in Indian History: Urban Demography, Society, and Politics* (Delhi, 1991).

[58] See Irfan Habib, "Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India," *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. XXIX, 1969.

Several studies of the general expansion of cities and towns in Mughal India note that places of pilgrimage constituted a distinct type of population center, but most authors tend to downplay or ignore the link between urban development and religion. For instance, in his monograph on urban centers, *Town, Market, Mint and Port in the Mughal Empire*, M.P. Singh refers to pilgrimage sites, noting that one major category of Mughal urban centers "consisted of those towns which were pilgrim centres and possessed sacred spots. A number of them were situated on the banks of holy rivers. In this case their sanctity and proximity to rivers (Ganges and Jamuna, etc.) combined to facilitate commercial intercourse; and the constant influx of pilgrims attracted merchants, craftsmen and labourers from far and near, adding to their size and trade." [59] Singh provides in his footnotes an extensive list of sacred towns described in his sources, which are primarily of Mughal provenance, but also include some European writings. But he does not attempt to explicate, beyond his reference above to propinquity and the pilgrims' purchasing demand, what the connection between trade and religion may have been. In a similar manner, Gavin Hambly points out the importance of places of pilgrimage as a specific urban type in both North and South India. For Hambly, however, the religious and economic facets of population centers appear to not only to be disconnected, but in fact are perceived to support conflicting social functions. Thus he writes that in the case of the important center of Banaras, the

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[59] *Town, Market, Mint, and Port in Mughal India*, pp. 11-12.

city "*despite* its sacral character, was also a major manufacturing and commercial centre".[60]

Many of the major inter-regional pilgrimage centers of the Mughal period were located on or near major trading routes, with the most prominent sites including Makanpur, Hardwar, Pushkar, Allahabad, Banaras, Ayodhya, Ajmer, Braj/Mathura (near Agra) and Amritsar. Some holy sites had of course been from time immemorial a notable feature of India's religious landscape. However, a marked increase in patronage supporting the various institutions and people directly associated with pilgrimage centers is particularly notable beginning in Akbar's reign (1556-1605). The spread of new devotional religious movements in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often necessitated the establishment of sacred places distinct from the traditional centers of religion.[61] In other instances, older centers were revived and identified with the new movements through architectural and textual representations. It was essential for the popularization of sacred centers that representations of their religious significance be disseminated in vernacular languages, as opposed to the elite languages of Sanskrit and Persian. This use of vernacular languages to transmit religious teachings was most conspicuously promoted by the popular devotional movements of the Mughal period, and was one of their defining features.

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[60] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, p. 438, emphasis added.

[61] Chris Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, p. 136; The initiation by the local ruler of an annual pilgrimage fair through a royal ceremony, the Maghi mela, in Ratantpur, in modern Madhya Pradesh, has been dated to 1583. Makan Jha, "Pilgrims and the Centres of Pilgrimage in Chhatisgarh", *Journal of Social Research*, Vol. XVII: No. 1 (March, 1974), pp. 99-100.

The interdependent relationship of commerce and devotionalism has been well documented in the case of the Sikhs, due in large part to the fact that the Sikh scriptures were composed during the Mughal period itself. The leaders of the Sikh religion actively developed large pilgrimage centers as part of the expansion of their religious movement. In doing so, the early Sikh leaders depended quite explicitly for financial support upon those among their followers who were connected with trade, particularly merchants and shopkeepers originating from the Khatri caste, as well as artisans, many of whom were from low-caste backgrounds.[62] The research of historian Sunita Puri has demonstrated how Sikhism and commercialization were closely interdependent processes. Puri writes that "Guru Ram Das [r. 1574-1581] took special care to ensure commercial progress of the new township", including the deliberate settlement of commercial groups in the area, and under his direction "a market, i.e., Guru-ka-Bazar was set up and a number of rich bankers and traders were encouraged to settle down in the new township". As the Khatris entered the fold of Sikhism, notes Puri, "their wealth placed enormous resources at the disposal of the Sikh Gurus. It was with the financial backing of the commercial class of the Khatris.... That Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjun [r. 1581-1606] could carry out their plans for the consolidation and expansion of Sikhism."[63] Puri goes on to emphasize the mutually reinforcing relation between pilgrimage towns and commercial development:

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[62] J.S. Grewal, in *The Sikhs of the Panjab* (Cambridge, 1990), writes that while the number of Nanak's followers cannot be accurately estimated, that in addition to artisans, farmers, and others, "Khatris were rather numerous among his followers", a groups which included "petty traders, shop-keepers, agents of merchants, itinerant salesmen.", p. 40.

[63] Puri, *Advent of Sikh Religion*, p. 170.

> In founding the town of Amritsar Guru Ram Das had also laid the foundation of [the] future commercial importance of the new city. However, it was only after the construction of Harmandir [temple in Amritsar], the chief centre of Sikh pilgrimage, that there was dramatic transformation and consolidation of Amritsar as a great centre of trade and industry. With the influx of visitors and settlers in the vicinity of the temple, many craftsmen from different parts of the country including carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, dyers, utensil makers, etc., sought business in Amritsar. With a quick turnover of certain articles sold by small traders and craftsmen, the number of shopkeepers had grown and specialized markets in specific commodities had developed around the site of the present Golden Temple.[64]

In contrast to the establishment of new pilgrimage centers carried out by the founding Sikh Gurus, the Mathura-Braj region had a long history as a sacred center. But while Mathura was an ancient holy town of the deity Krishna, its religious monuments were nearly all destroyed by various Muslim iconoclasts, beginning with Mahmud of Ghazni and continuing into the Delhi Sultanate period. The area only began to see a revival during the reign of Sher Shah Sur, when the ruler had a road built in the 1540s connecting Lahore to the Deccan.[65] Subsequently, under Akbar's rule, many new temples were built, by Jains as well as by Krishna devotees, and the area rapidly became an all-India center of pilgrimage.[66] Many of these temples were notable for their combination of Vaishnavite and Islamic architectural elements.[67]

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[64] *Ibid.*, p. 170-71. Grewal has reached similar conclusions regarding the causal link between commerce and the growth of Sikh pilgrimage centers; *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, pp. 51-52.

[65] Entwistle, *Braj*, p. 145.

[66] D.L. Drake-Brockmann, *Mathura: A Gazetteer*. Father Monserrate noted in the. 1580s that at one Hindu temple, "Huge crowds of pilgrims come from all over India to this temple". See also S.R. Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (London, 1940), p. 133.

[67] Entwistle, *Braj*, p. 158.

The Mathura area was also important for its proximity to Agra, which was politically significant as it periodically served as the Mughal capital. The famed Keshav Rai temple built by Bir Singh Deo in Mathura was in fact visible from Agra and seems to have been perceived as a challenge to Mughal sovereignty.[68] Agra was also of great economic importance due to its position as a central node on main north-south and east-west trade routes. The city also served as a pivot in the North Indian credit system. The French traveler Tavernier noted in the mid-seventeenth century that merchants could obtain bills obviating the need to transport cash between Agra and Surat in the West, and Agra and Bengal in the East.[69] Wealthy merchants who traveled to Agra combined their trading activity with religious observance, and supported and frequented the pilgrimage centers of Mathura. Thus an English merchant, William Jessup, observed that in 1656 a merchant friend of his waited to leave "untill now that severall Banian merchants of quallity, which came up to Matra and Gocall to worship, are retourning to Amadabad, soe well attended with souldiers that it is conceived he may with them travaile safely."[70]

Other notable examples of sacred centers and shrines in north India that combined religious pilgrimage to sacred bathing sites with commercial exchange include the periodic gathering at Hardwar, that continued to grow rapidly through the

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[68] J. Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, vol. 3, p. 175.

[69] Cited in W.H.Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar*, p. 248. For the role of Agra in trade, see K.K. Trivedi, "The Mughal Province of Agra During the 17th Century (1582-1707): A Political and Economic Study" (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Aligarh Muslim University, 1978), ch. 7

[70] Quoted in Entwhistle, *Braj*, p. 174.

eighteenth century.[71] In Bihar, "annual or biannual fairs at religious shrines or near rivers on the occasion of bathing festivals also provided an opportunity for promoting local commerce."[72] Gaya in particular had great number of annual pilgrims, and had "a flourishing trade in semi-precious and other stones and related crafts of religious significance."[73] Ayodhya, in the Gangetic plain, represents another ancient pilgrimage town which underwent rapid development under Mughal rule. While well known for the large streams of devotees that annually visited its temples dedicated to the deity Ram, Ayodhya also saw a significant amount of trade. As noted by Hans Bakker, Ayodhya was a "centre of political and commercial activity, with which the development of a centre of pilgrimage went hand in hand. Periodical fairs may have served commercial as well as spiritual ends."[74]

It should be emphasized, however, that the religiously competitive atmosphere often apparent in pilgrimage centers did not inhibit trade, nor did it incite animosity between Hindus and Muslims. On the contrary, many of the religious and commercial fairs of the time were notable for their inclusion of both Hindu and Muslim devotees.[75] The massive annual Pushkar *mela* in vicinity of Ajmer, for example, attracted Hindus and Muslims, while functioning as "a sort of yearly market, for those who were busy in

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[71] Lochtefeld, *Haridwara, Haradwara, Gangadwara*, pp. 105, 119-135.

[72] Ahmed Raza Khan, "Suba of Bihar under the Mughals (1528-1707)" (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, Aligarh Muslim University, 1985), p. 362.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 453.

[74] *Ayodhya*, p. 132.

[75] Cf. Muhammad Umar, *Islam in India During the Eighteenth Century* (New Delhi, 1993), p. 388-89.

animal trades. Oxes, camels, horses, etc., of the famous places around Ajmer [were] sold by merchants to peasants and traders."[76] Another well known pilgrimage site, the sufi shrine of Nizam ud-Din Auliya in the Mughal capital of Delhi, also attracted both Hindu and Muslim devotees, and provided accommodation for numerous artisans as well as merchants to display and sell their products at its annual festival.[77] The shrine of Shah Madar in Makanpur, near Qanauj, was yet another popular shrine that was frequented by followers of both traditions, where once a year "For three days multitudes of devotees assembled there and held the fair. Business men and traders also flocked to the fair and earned enormous profits."[78]

Popular religious assemblages served to justify the very idea of economic exchange, in an atmosphere suffused with the anti-caste message of devotionalism. As pilgrimage centers grew in size and popularity in Mughal India, they served as a powerful conduit for spreading the notion that commercial intercourse was a socially-sanctioned and even valued activity, encouraged at the heart of religious gatherings. Sacred shrines and holy places drew massive numbers of devotees, often from long distances, according to particular calendrical cycles, on an annual or semi-annual basis. On such occasions, pilgrims overcame caste proscriptions on social interaction, as people of diverse caste (and religious) backgrounds came to participate in popular holy

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[76] Syed Liyaqat Hussain Moini, *The City of Ajmer During the Eighteenth Century: A Political, Administrative and Economic History* (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, Aligarh Muslim University, 1987), p. 388.

[77] Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqa-e Dehli*, tr. Chandra Shekhar and Shama Mitra Chenoy (Delhi, 1989), p. 9.

[78] Muhammad Zameeruddin Siddiqi, *Muslim Religious Movements in India in the Eighteenth Century* (Delhi, 1964), p. 148.

celebrations. Devotional teachings cultivated these interactions by providing powerful sanction to cross-caste equality. In addition to the attainment of spiritual benefit, this facilitated the exchange of merchandise which was so central to the pilgrimage experience. Thus, in their capacity as market places, sacred sites and their vicinities provided an arena for transferring commodities, as well as a gathering spot for buyers and sellers coming from distant areas. Many sacred sites also encouraged the immigration and long-term settlement of merchants, artisans, and laborers. Under the patronage of wealthy traders, pilgrimage sites could develop the local economy, centered around investments in religious buildings such as temples and shrines, supporting religious specialists, and creating a demand for goods needed by local residents. Consequently, such centers acted as a magnet for small and mid-level traders to set up shop, and for immigrant artisans and laborers, many of whom were drawn from rural homes pursuing a better livelihood in the growing commercial economy.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mercantile Religious Communities and the Mughal State

Introduction

This chapter examines the nature of the interactions between religious associations and the Mughal state, with the aim of understanding how both merchants and rulers sought to augment their power within the imperial framework. I argue that religious groups played an important role in the organization, functioning, and protection of mercantile interests, and in this capacity exerted considerable influence at the imperial court, consolidating their position under Akbar (r. 1556-1605). Historians have overlooked the political role of religious groups due to a tendency to recognize only the more formal types of mercantile organization based in legal documents and charters, focusing upon official, contractual relations between merchants and the state.[1] These notions, based on a European model of socio-political organization, fail to adequately account for the less "formal", but equally effective, kind of civic association found in early modern India in the form of "religious" communities. Thus the perennial presence at the Mughal court of leaders of religious groups has conventionally been seen as a gauge of a particular emperor's curiosity in or tolerance of diverse spiritual traditions, with Akbar's actions representing the paradigm of liberal, inclusivist rule.

[1] M.N. Pearson, has noted that the Mughal empire did not issue such formal treaties, but concludes that the Mughals therefore behaved unpredictably toward merchants: "The [English East India] company tried....to secure a firm legal basis for their trade in the empire, with such matters as customs duties, ownership of the property of their deceased, trial of English offenders, and their right to buy property and carry arms all clearly set out in a formal treaty. Jahangir did not make treaties in the European sense with anyone....The English, therefore, were forced to content themselves with farmans and orders from the emperor and his officials, which were not always observed and were revokable at the whim of the emperor." *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 118.

This view, however, overlooks the manner in which such leaders represented the interests of their followers and devotees to the state, which ensured that merchant groups were provided a measure of protection by state officials, and which gave the merchants a voice in the development of imperial proclamations concerning religious activities, trade and taxation. The appearance of religious figures at the Mughal court was occasionally mentioned in imperial chronicles, but became a topic of central concern in religious biographies and devotional literature, writings which thus provide a rich, but largely untapped, source of information concerning state-merchant relations.

The amicable *modus vivendi* established between religious representatives and the court of Akbar was less in evidence during the reigns of Jahangir (1605-27) and Shah Jahan (1628-58), but a fair degree of cooperation and interaction did continue. *Farmans* favoring groups such as the Jains were issued by these two emperors, for example, and the Vallabhite sampradaya continued to receive patronage for building temples.[2] The imperatives of ongoing administrative centralization called forth an increasingly orthodox version of Islamic imperial ideology, with negative implications for non-Muslim, and heterodox Muslim, groups, but the success of Akbar's model of integration limited the desire to change the system too drastically. These arrangements were to receive a shock, however, due to the transformation of imperial policy initiated by the emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707). The reign of Aurangzeb is generally understood to have been a period of state-sponsored religious intolerance and

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[2] For imperial support of the Jains, see below; evidence of patronage for the Vallabhites is discussed in Richard J. Cohen, "Sectarian Vaishnavism: the Vallabha *Sampradaya*", in , Peter Gaeffke and David A. Utz, eds., *Identity and Division in Cults and Sects in South Asia* (Philadelphia, 1984), pp. 70-71.

repression, carried out in the name of a strict Sunni Islam. Under his direction, numerous Hindu temples were demolished, religious processions and fairs were restricted or banned, and the *jiziya* poll-tax was reinstituted, after having been abolished by his great-grandfather, Akbar. On the basis of these actions, Aurangzeb is commonly portrayed as the emperor who virtually reversed the socially enlightened and religiously tolerant rule of Akbar. In the words of Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam, for modern scholarship, "Akbar and Aurangzeb are the hero and the villain respectively of the Mughal period."[3] In this chapter I will analyze Mughal attitudes and policies toward non-Muslim religious communities and their representatives in a framework which highlights the economic ramifications of imperial "religious" policy. In so doing I aim to avoid economically, theologically, or psychologically reductionistic explanations. Instead, I hope to demonstrate that an examination of the changing disposition of Mughal sovereigns and religious leaders toward one another can provide insight into the relationship between merchants and state.

In previous chapters I have argued that religious movements, in addition to their spiritual and religious dimensions, fulfilled social and economic needs of the expanding mercantile and artisan classes of Mughal India. Without assurances of protection from the state, however, merchants were nonetheless left in a vulnerable position. Dangers to commercial enterprise ranged from bandits that threatened trade routes and markets, to state officials that demanded taxes at an excessively high rate, or who sometimes

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[3] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam , "Introduction" , *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam eds., (New Delhi, 1998), p. 19.

extorted forced loans from well-to-do traders. Here I argue that leaders of devotional associations performed a critical role by creating a link between merchants and the state. Renunciants represented their followers at the courts of local kings as well as at the imperial level in the Mughal court. This representation can be seen as being effective on two levels. First, in a general sense, religious leaders were able to give voice to the social and religious values of mercantile communities, informing political rulers of the beliefs and practices of their followers. Because many renunciants were themselves from trading backgrounds, they possessed, in addition to their religious knowledge, a close familiarity with the merchant life. Second, religious leaders often made specific requests to the emperor, urging him to take particular steps to protect the interests of their merchant-devotees. Such leaders thus obtained *farmans* that benefited followers, including edicts guaranteeing security for pilgrims' travel, protection of roadside inns, temples and other places of worship, and the reduction of pilgrimage, transit, and poll taxes.

Jain renunciants at the Mughal court

I begin my discussion with the history of Jain monks at the Mughal court, a group whose relations with imperial officials were recorded in greater detail and in more sources in comparison to other religious communities. While the nature of the Jains' relation with individual political rulers changed over time, Jains had for centuries worked to develop close ties with a variety of political authorities. From about the twelfth century on, Jain "monastic lineages competed vigorously with each other for the patronage of secular authorities, and for lay support in general." In her examination of

Jain religious literature, Phyllis Granoff argues that in the struggles between Jain groups for securing patronage from political authorities, the production of hagiographies was "one tool of sectarian competition."[4] In such struggles, the authority of a particular sect could be elevated through the assertion of a leading saint's reputation as a superior religious figure, even if portrayed in a mythical fashion. But the religious and political functions of hagiographical literature were not restricted to inter-sectarian conflicts alone. The history of Jain monks' relations with the Mughals, recorded in hagiographical and devotional literature, illuminates how renunciant leaders were able to secure a series of concessions and promises of protection for both religious and economic concerns. The friendly relations between the monks and the Mughal emperors were very important to the Jain community, as is reflected by the prominent place they were given in religious biographies of their leaders.[5]

Within a few years of his conquest of the province of Gujarat in 1572, Akbar established ties with the top Jain leaders, inviting them to appear and remain at the seat of his new court in Fatehpur Sikri.[6] In 1575 Akbar specially commissioned a building, the *Ibadatkhana*, to serve as a center where thinkers, scholars, priests and renunciants could assemble to discuss and debate religious matters. In the *Ain-i Akbari*, Abu Fazl describes the popular response: "To the delightful precincts of that mansion founded

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[4] Phyllis Granoff, "Svetambara Jains in Northwest India", in *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India*, p. 145.

[5] Pushpa Prasad, "Akbar and the Jains," in *Akbar and His India*, pp. 96-108. Pearson also notes the "intermediary" function of the Jain monks at the Mughal court, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, p. 139.

[6] A. Ali Nadeem Rezavi, "Revisiting Fatehpur Sikri: An Interpretation of Certain Buildings," in *Akbar and His India*, Irfan Habib, ed., (Delhi, 1997), pp. 174-187.

upon Truth, thousands upon thousands of inquirers from the seven climes came with a heartfelt respect and waited for the advent of the Shahinshah."[7] Upon the occasion of Akbar's visit to the *Ibadatkhana* in 1578, Abu Fazl writes that the hall witnessed "The assemblage of the wise of every religion and sect," including "sufi, philosopher, orator, jurist, Sunni, Shia, Brahman, Jati [*yati*, Jain monk], Siura [Jain], Carbak, Nazarene, Jew, Sabi (Sabian), Zoroastrian, and others."[8] Akbar's historian comments that the gathering also included wicked men who betrayed their ignorance, and were responsible for acts of slander and the creation of discord. Due to the enlightened among the assembled, however, "Bigoted ulama and routine lawyers.... found their position difficult."

Jain monks were prominent among those who visited and resided at the imperial court in the second half of Akbar's reign.[9] Gujarati merchants and their Jain representatives had cause at the time to be well-disposed toward Mughal rule, since the imperial conquest of Gujarat established political security that was conducive for commercial activity in the province. In these circumstances, the head monk of the Svetambara branch of Jainism, Hiravijaya Suri, left Gujarat to attend Akbar's court in Fatehpur Sikri at the emperor's invitation. Stopping at Agra en route, Suri's appearance was celebrated by the entire Jain community resident in the city, who came out to greet the monk with great ceremony.[10] Suri went on to spend more than two years at Fatehpur Sikri, from 1583 to 1585, periodically obtaining audience with Akbar himself.

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[7] *Ain-i Akbari*, vol. III, tr. H. Beveridge, pp. 157-60.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 365-66.

[9] Prasad, "Akbar and the Jains,", p. 98.

[10] *Ibid.*, p 99.

After residing for some time at the court, Hiravijaya Suri was allowed to make several requests of the emperor, which he did in the interest of the Jain community more broadly. In response to Suri's demands, Akbar issued several *farmans* in support of the monk's wishes: animal slaughter was prohibited for the duration of a Jain holy festival, state escheat of Jain property was stopped, Jain temples were ordered to be protected from harm, and a tax upon religious pilgrims was lifted. After Suri left the court, a number of other Jain monks, including Suri's disciple Shanti Chandra, stayed on to maintain close ties with the Mughals, with some monks remaining in residence to the end of Akbar's reign. Chandra composed a Sanskrit panegyric for Akbar, which he recited to the emperor, and at the time of the monk's departure for Gujarat, Akbar rescinded the *jiziya*, and prohibited animal slaughter.[11] In subsequent years, Akbar continued to issue *farmans* supporting the Jain community, such as in 1590 when the emperor gave a royal order which described Hiravijaya Suri as a great ascetic who had been at the royal court, and commanded "all officers, including Hajji Habibullah by name, to extend full tolerance to the Jains."[12] Hajji Habibullah's name appears several times in the *Ain-i Akbari*, revealing that this officer was in a position to protect the economic interest of Jain traders. In 1582, according to the *Ain*, Akbar appointed "acute and unavaricious [economic] overseers. As it came to the royal hearing that from the abundance of business and cupidity, there was much oppression in the conduct of the work of buying and selling, and that the traders were injured, [Akbar] from a love

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

of justice and from graciousness, ordered that various articles should be put into the charge of tactful and honest men". Habibullah was in this capacity put in charge of sugar; the next year he was appointed as superintendent of the rates of goods. The *Ain* records his death in 1594.[13] In additional acts indicating his positive disposition toward the Jains, Akbar in 1591, upon a monk's request, released a prisoner who had been jailed in Gujarat, and in 1592 granted Hiravijaya Suri's request that a number of hills in both Gujarat and Bengal, considered holy to the Jains, along with adjacent temples, as well as "all other places of pilgrimage of the Jain Svetembar community throughout the empire" be bestowed to Suri as the rightful leader of the Jains.

Jain renunciants were well-suited to discern and represent the needs of merchant lay-followers because, as noted by Makrand Mehta, monks present at the Mughal court "were either merchants themselves or they came from the business families before they [became] ascetics." Mehta further remarks that "The contemporary Gujarati sources show beyond doubt that there was a close collaboration between the Jain monks and businessmen" resulting in a "Jain religio-business ethic."[14] The congenial relationship between Akbar and the Jains was not without its opponents, however. Pushpa Prasad writes of an incident where:

> "According to the *Vijayaprasasti Kavya* the Brahmans felt jealous of the exalted position enjoyed by the Jain acharya at the Mughal court. Therefore they sent Raja Ramdas (Kachwaha) to tell Akbar that the Jains were atheists. The Emperor asked that a debate be arranged on the subject of the existence of God

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[13] *Ain- Akbari*, pp. 585, 599, 1000.

[14] *Indian Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Historical Perspective* (Delhi, 1991), p. 98

> in the assembly hall and invited the learned, including Brahmans. Vijayasen Suri proved from the Jain scriptures the falseness of the accusation and convinced the Brahmans, 'Shaikhs' (Muslim scholars), the emperor and others, that the Jain conception was similar to that expounded in the Samkhya philosophy of the Brahmans."[15]

This description by Jain scripture of conflict between Jains and Brahmans (with Muslim scholars present) at the royal court evinces a significant theme which appears in other devotionalist hagiographies of the Mughal period. While the veracity of a depiction of a resounding theological or spiritual triumph by the Brahmans' opponents can be open to question, this theme nonetheless highlights a social struggle for imperial recognition and legitimation. In this regard, such stories record the ascendance of non-Brahman religious leaders, particularly those tied to mercantile communities, into political realms from which they were previously absent or under-represented.

Upon ascension to the throne, Jahangir maintained the Mughals' relationship with Jains, reconfirming the *farman*s issued by Akbar, and received leading monks at court, many of whom stayed on for years at a time. Around 1612, however, a note of discord entered the relations between the monks and Jahangir, as related in Jain hagiographies as well as Mughal chronicles. In this instance, the emperor had one day engaged a young monk by the name of Siddhichandra in a religious discussion. At one point Jahangir claimed that youth should be spent in pleasurable pursuits, not in ascetic practice. The monk is reported to have offered a cogent counter-argument, thereby drawing the ruler's ire, who then "changed his tone and ordered that [Siddhichandra] should marry and assume the status of a householder and abandon the barren and

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[15] Pushpa, "Akbar and the Jains," p. 103.

miserable life of an ascetic." The dispute ended with Jahangir banishing the monk to the forest, although the two parties were later reconciled. Another instance of antagonism occurred during the same year when Jahangir issued an order banishing all Jain monks from imperial territory. Upon hearing of the development, the Jain community in Agra sent for their leading *acharya* in Gujarat to go to the Mughal court and persuade Jahangir to rescind his order, and the emperor agreed to the request. But imperial hostility surfaced yet again in 1618, when Jahangir issued another order for the expulsion of Jain monks from India. Jahangir recorded the incident with scorn:

> "The Sewra [i.e., Jain renunciants] are a group of Indian heretics who always go about stark naked.... The Banya caste consider them their guides and masters, but they don't bow to them or venerate them. These Sewras are of two sects. One is called Tapa, and the other Karthal. The Man Singh mentioned above was the leader of the Karthal sect. The leader of the Tapa sect is Bal Chand. Both of them were constantly in attendance of His Majesty Arsh-Ashyani [i.e., Akbar].... The Sewra sect is found throughout India, but they are mostly in Gujarat because the commerce there is generally in the hands of the Banya. Aside from idol temples, they have built houses for them to dwell in and worship in, but they are actually abodes of abomination to which they send their wives and daughters to the Sewras. There is no shame or modesty, and all sorts of abominations and lewdness are perpetrated. I therefore issued an order for the expulsion of the Sewras, and decrees were dispatched in all directions for the Sewras to be expelled from the realm wherever they may be."[16]

Despite the hostility of this event, within a period of months the emperor had written a friendly letter to a leading Jain monk, at least partially repairing their rift. During the reign of Shah Jahan the Mughals maintained good relations with leading Jains, and many *farman*s were granted in support of the leading Jain merchant of the time,

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[16] *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India,* tr and ed. by Wheeler M. Thackston (Oxford, 1999), pp. 250-51.

Shantidas Jawahari, who served as court jeweler in addition to his other trading activities.[17] In 1625 Shantidas was allowed by the emperor to complete the building of a magnificent Jain temple in a suburb of Ahmadabad.[18] The emperor's support for the Jains was undermined, however, by prince Aurangzeb's decision to desecrate this temple and turn it into a mosque in 1645. Subsequently, Shah Jahan expressed his support for the Jains in a *farman* written to restore the temple to Shantidas. The wealth of Shantidas and his family, from which the royal family took loans, meant that Shah Jahan felt compelled to maintain good ties with the Jains.[19] Even Aurangzeb, upon accession to the throne "was anxious to befriend and conciliate so powerful a subject and financier as Shantidas and to attach him to his cause."[20]

The *Janmlila* of Dadu Dayal

As mentioned above, the presence of Jains at the royal court was exceptional in that multiple, independent sources, both Mughal and Jain, record the interaction of monks with the emperors. Yet the various accounts of Akbar's *Ibadatkhana* at Fatehpur Sikri make it clear that numerous other religious groups also sent representatives to the court as well. Hagiographical writings of devotional sects testify to the significance of these interactions for specific religious communities. Indeed, the creation of hagiographies contributed to, and served as a record of, the efforts by mercantile sects

[17] See M.S. Commissariat, *Studies in the History of Gujarat* (Ahmedabad, 1987), pp. 53-76.

[18] The German traveler J. Albert de Mandelslo referred to as "the main mosque (temple) of the Benjans (Banyas) which without dispute is one of the noblest structures that can be seen." Quoted in Commissariat, *History of Gujarat*, p. 62.

[19] Shantidas' son also borrowed money to Shah Jahan's son, prince Murad Bakhsh.

[20] Makrand Mehta, *Indian Merchants*.

to obtain a respected position at the imperial court, and by implication, the success or failure of such groups to garner state-sanctioned legitimacy. The depiction of these attempts contains what is no doubt legendary material. Nevertheless, such documents provide a glimpse of the socio-political struggles experienced by commercially significant groups as these aspired for greater recognition and authority. Thus these works represent a repository of insiders' perceptions of the Mughal disposition toward their groups, and in this capacity help to explain the motivations behind merchants support for or opposition to imperial rule.

The hagiography of Dadu Dayal (1544-1603), the *Janmlila*, contains themes similar to those found in the Jain literature.[21] The attendance of Dadu at the court at Fatehpur Sikri, the great respect shown to him by Akbar, and the attempt by jealous Brahmans to undermine this relationship present Dadu as a figure mirroring that of the Jain monks. Gopal, the author of the *Janmlila*, who identifies himself as "an ascetic and a Baniya"[22] and also as "by caste a merchant," begins his narrative with a discussion of the spiritual accomplishments of Dadu Dayal. At one point Dadu is reported to have traveled with a number of disciples to the residence of Bhagvant Das (heir of Raja Bihar Mal, and the adoptive father of the high-ranking *mansabdar* Raja Man Singh) at Fatehpur Sikri, where the *sant* was brought before the king. At this point "The King sent news to the Emperor [Akbar] that Svamiji, the joygiver had arrived. The Emperor

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[21] For a description of Dadu see Chapter Two, *supra*, pp. 114-15.

[22] The *Janmlila* is translated in Winand M. Callewaert, tr. and ed., *Dadu Janma Lila: The Hindi Biography of Dadu Dayal.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988. References are to section and verse numbers. 16.28

wanted to see him immediately, he was even ready to come and see Dadu at the King's residence."[23] Akbar issued repeated invitations to Dadu to come meet him, and Bhagvant Das then promises to bring Dadu to the emperor's palace. In the meantime, the emperor sends three advisors to question Dadu, two of whom the *Janmlila* identifies by name, Abdul Fazl and Birbal, men who were in fact Akbar's confidantes, the former the imperial chronicler, the latter serving as a minister. Birbal, a Hindu, had also served earlier under king Bhagvant Das, and in the *Janmlila* acts as a "negotiator" between Dadu and Akbar. These advisors give a glowing report about Dadu to the emperor, who then instructs them to have Dadu brought to court. The king responds to Akbar: "'This saint does not go anywhere', and Akbar asked: 'Will he allow me to meet him, or not?' The king then stood up and requested the emperor to be patient." Eventually, the *Janmlila* continues, "The Sheikh and King Bhagvant Das escorted Dadu to Emperor Akbar. 'With Allah or Ram in your mind, please come with us', they said."[24] During their meeting, Akbar proceeds to ask Dadu questions about his life and spiritual knowledge, which he answers to the emperor's delight.

The *Janmlila* also recounts a conflict that arose between Dadu's disciple, Madhav Bhai, and the disciple's father-in-law, named Tursi. According to the *Janmlila*, Tursi, "an evil-minded Brahman" had convinced Akbar to lock up Madhav Bhai with a lion in its cage. It was the lion, however, which expressed a fear of Madhav, with the

[23] *Ibid.*, section 5.3.

[24] *Ibid.*, section 5.21.

result that "Akbar saw that the saint was a man of Allah."[25] As a consequence, Akbar requests that he be allowed to meet Madhav's *guru*, that is, Dadu, and proceeds to issue repeated invitations to the *sant*. The narrative continues with Akbar praising Dadu to king Bhagvant Das. Unnamed individuals are reported to have slandered Dadu to Bhagvant Das, saying the *sant* offends people because "He proclaims that Hindus and Muslims are one, that Brahmans and Baniyas are equal." Dadu is thus accused of bringing "disorder to society." Gopal acknowledges that indeed Dadu claims 'Brahmans and Baniyas are powerful Kings'. Dadu then sends his disciples to converse with Man Singh, and finally 'Seeing that the King was favourable (to Dadu), the Brahmans felt badly humiliated." Some Brahmans next complain that people have begun to seek out Dadu, so that "nobody comes to our Hindu rituals", and if the king were to lend his support to Dadu, 'everyone will join his sect." In spite of these protestations, Dadu eventually makes Man Singh his disciple, and in the end "the king was satisfied and ignored the Brahmans." At its conclusion, the hagiography mentions that Dadu had met Akbar in 1585.

The cultural expression of Mughal authority

The stories presented in the Jain literature and the *Janmlila* need to be seen in the context of Mughal expansion, consolidation, and projection of power and authority in North India. As Mughal armies completed the conquest of North India, and established firm administrative control over its provinces, the projection of political authority was inseparable from cultural forms of expression. Regional rulers, clan

[25] *Ibid.*, section 6.12-14.

chiefs and landholders were all forced to come to terms with Mughal paramountcy, and the melding of elites of diverse backgrounds into the *mansabdari* system provided a structure which exposed such power holders to Indo-Muslim imperial culture. Studies of Akbar's rule stress the novelty of the emperor's adoption of a liberal religious and ideological attitude, which is portrayed as decisive for the establishment of Mughal authority in a land where the vast majority of the population, including significant segments of indigenous landholders and warrior-elites, was non-Muslim. Some scholars argue that Akbar's catholic attitude preceded and made possible his political success,[26] others that Akbar's religious beliefs were the result of the close political alliance between the Mughals and Hindu kings,[27] and yet others that "Akbar's personal behavior and traits evolved coterminously with his strategic, and administrative policies."[28] But regardless of the formulation of cause and effect, such actions as Akbar's abolition of taxes on religious pilgrims and the *jiziya*, his participation in Hindu forms of worship, the invocation of divine kingship, and the adoption of Hindu dress and customs into his public persona and court rituals, are seen as clear evidence of the emperor's willingness to adapt imperial ideology to conform with non-Islamic cultural and political norms.

The Rajputs of Rajasthan represent the single most important non-Muslim group

[26] Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Akbar and Religion* (Delhi, 1989).

[27] Satish Chandra, "Mughal Relations with the Rajput States of Rajasthan: The Foundations," in *Mughal Religious Policies, the Rajputs and the Deccan* (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 1-53; Iqtidar Alam Khan, "Akbar's Personality Traits and World Outlook – A Critical Reappraisal," in Irfan Habib, ed., *Akbar and His India* (Delhi, 1997).

[28] Ibn Hasan, *The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire and its Practical Working up to the Year 1657* (New Delhi, 1970 [1936]), p. 254.

which Akbar incorporated into the imperial system, an achievement accomplished through a combination of military, political, and cultural means.[29] Beginning in the 1560s Akbar undertook a series of successful campaigns into the region, and numerous Rajput chieftains, recognizing the Mughals' military supremacy, were quick to cement alliances through marriage with the royal family. Akbar and his successors subsequently worked to centralize imperial administration in the Rajput territories, efforts which were visible in the diffusion of imperial models of rule and increasing bureaucratization of the government. For example, Norman Ziegler has demonstrated how in the Marwar region of Rajasthan, the Mughal *jagir* system began to be imitated on a smaller scale through the use of *patos*, written deeds granting temporary rights to revenue collection in specified villages.[30] Imperial hegemony in Marwar, Ziegler notes, was facilitated by the compatibility of Rajput and Mughal notions of loyalty, service, and honour. Rajput rulers' steadfast support of the empire "rested primarily upon a basic 'fit' between Rajput ideals and aspirations, expressed in local myth and symbol, and Mughal actions in this area, which did not challenge fundamental Rajput tenets regarding order and precedence."[31] Yet, despite this cultural compatibility, the spread of Mughal patterns of rule effected the political dissolution of Rajput family lineages

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[29] See S. Inayat A. Zaidi, "Akbar and the Rajput Principalities: Integration into Empire," in Habib, ed., *Akbar and his India*, pp. 15-24.

[30] "Some Notes on Rajput Loyalties".

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 210. The notion of a "fit" between these two groups has been elaborated in an essay by Stewart Gordon in which he emphasizes shared a concept of military ethos. In 17th century Rajasthan, "There is a fundamental attitude in these stories that the achievement of honour and social mobility was possible through warfare and the sword." "Zones of Military Entrepreneurship in India", p. 184.

which hitherto had dominated local territories, and replaced them with a more centralized, hierarchical version of authority.

Those Rajput clans which successfully established a relationship of alliance and service with the Mughals, such as the Kachhwahas, become wealthy and powerful as a result.[32] Raja Bhagvant Das and his son, Raja Man Singh, both of whom are portrayed as admirers and supporters of Dadu Dayal in the *Janmlila*, represent kings who became close allies and powerful officials in the empire under Akbar. Man Singh in particular rose to prominence as a high-ranking *mansabdar* and governor in the Mughal service.[33] Catherine B. Asher has examined how Man Singh used his augmented resources to expand imperial control while simultaneously aggrandizing his personal power. Thus the raja, in his commission of numerous buildings including mosques and temples, employed Mughal architectural idioms combined with regional styles, thereby projecting both central power and his authority as a Rajput king. Buildings such as the Govind Deva temple in Vrindavan, begun in 1590, incorporate motifs drawn from the buildings of Fatehpur Sikri, while temples constructed by the Kachhwahas in Amber and Jaipur also incorporated Mughal styles.[34] During the reign of Jahangir, however, Man Singh began to assert a degree of autonomy from central control, drawing the ire of the emperor as a consequence. Jahangir reports that the "hypocrite" and "old wolf"

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[32] S. P. Gupta, *The Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan (c. 1650-c. 1750)* (Delhi, 1986) p. 1.

[33] Man Singh's paternal aunt was the wife of Akbar. I. H. Qureshi, *The Administration of the Mughal Empire* (Karachi, 1966), p. 102.

[34] Catherine B. Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*, New Cambridge History of India, part I, vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 68-69.

Man Singh repeatedly ignored his requests to appear at court.[35] Jahangir subsequently interfered in the succession process upon Man Singh's death, awarding his chieftainship to a different man than the presumed heir.[36]

The successful integration of regional rulers into the imperial system achieved by Akbar and Jahangir allowed the emperor Shah Jahan to more aggressively assert central control over his nobles. This shift was apparent in Shah Jahan's formalization of courtly culture and in his promotion of a more orthodox version of Islam in the empire.[37] Shah Jahan also introduced more uniformity and standardization in his building projects, reducing the number of architectural forms used in imperial constructions.[38] The nobility followed his lead in this regard, and Shah Jahan ensured that buildings constructed by imperial officials were in conformity with his ideas of proper architecture by frequently using such structures in his travels.[39] Shah Jahan also commissioned more mosque-building than had any earlier Mughal emperor, a change which foreshadowed Aurangzeb's architectural preference.[40]

The political and religious policies of Aurangzeb

The process of state centralization and the formalization of rule was greatly accelerated during the reign of Aurangzeb. In his administration, Aurangzeb

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[35] *Jahangirnama*, pp. 137-38.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

[37] Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*, pp. 217ff.

[38] Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture: An Outline of its History and Development, 1526-1858* (Munchen, 1991), pp. 93ff.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

[40] *Ibid.*, 117.

established a more accurate system of measurement of imperial territories, implemented a more efficient system of communication, extended territories under direct crown control (*khalisa*), and more frequently issued decrees of policy. Aurangzeb also issued orders for the composition and compilation of *fatwas* and *farmans*, the *Fatawa-i Alamgiri*, as "part of the first real attempt to impose a clearly defined legal system,"[41] and qazis, the local representatives of imperial (and mercantile) law, were given expanded powers.[42] Aurangzeb introduced numerous reforms in Mughal imperial culture which emphasized the importance he accorded to the strict observance of Islamic norms. These included a ban on wine-drinking and opium consumption at court, ending support for the production of chronicles and illustrated books, discontinuing patronage for artists such as painters and court musicians, and the reduction of sponsorship for the construction of large-scale architectural projects, save those with a direct religious purpose, primarily mosques.

The most controversial aspect of Aurangzeb's assertion of imperial power, though, concerns his policies which impacted non-Muslim subjects.[43] The major changes to imperial religious policy by Aurangzeb were put into place between 1658-1681, a period commencing with his coronation and ending when he moved the royal court out of its base in Delhi to pursue military campaigns in the Deccan. The initial changes to policies related to religious matters which began in 1659 included the

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[41] Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Introduction," Alam and Subrahmanyam eds., *Mughal State*, p. 31.

[42] M.P. Singh, *Town, Market, Mint, and Port in Mughal India* (Delhi, 1985), pp. 96 ff.

[43] See Sri Ram Sharma, The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors 3rd ed. (Delhi, 1988 [1940]), pp. 107-77; Satish Chandra, *Mughal Religious Policies, the Rajputs, and the Deccan* (New Delhi, 1993).

creation of a special office of the moral censor (*muhtasib*) and the removal of the *kalama* from imperial coins so as to prevent its defilement. The same year Aurangzeb issued the first of what were to be many edicts specifically targeting non-Sunni Muslim communities, banning the construction of new and the repair of old temples. In 1665 Aurangzeb assessed discriminatory internal customs duties on commodities traded, with the different rates depending on the religion of the merchant: Muslims were hence to be taxed at the rate of 2.5 percent, while Hindus were taxed at 5 percent.[44] The same year the Hindu festivals of Holi and Diwali were banned along with the production of animal and human figurines sold at Hindu and Muslim fairs, and a pilgrimage tax was levied on Hindus. Aurangzeb also issued an edict to governors and revenue officers to replace Hindu administrative officials with Muslims. In 1669 Aurangzeb abolished giving *darshan* on his balcony, and also banned Muharram processions. In 1679 he re-imposed the *jiziya* poll-tax on non-Muslims, leading to massive public protests in Delhi. Aurangzeb demolishes temples in dozens of locations throughout his domains including sites in Rajasthan, Bundelkhand, and the Panjab, and at pilgrimage centers such as Hardwar and Ayodhya. He also ordered some recently constructed Hindu temples destroyed, including the famed Vishvanath temple in Banaras.

To be sure, these edicts were implemented very unevenly, as Mughal state lacked the resources and means to systematically impose them throughout the imperial territories. Nonetheless, these policies clearly express the intent of Aurangzeb to enforce the demands of Islamic law according to his strict interpretation. Numerous

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[44] *Mirat-i Ahmadi*, tr. James Bird, pp. 258-59.

scholars have observed that Aurangzeb's policies weakened support for the empire, as these moves alienated critical non-Muslim allies and subjects, including the Rajputs and the Bundelas. For many observers, this was a critical shortcoming which ultimately led to the downfall of the empire. Furthermore, as noted by J.F. Richards, Aurangzeb's reformation of Mughal court culture itself inhibited "relations between the emperor and his senior officers. Considering the vital importance of the emperor-noble link in the Mughal system, this was a serious weakness."[45] Given the seemingly counterproductive outcome of these policies, scholars have been compelled to search for the motivating factors behind Aurangzeb's decisions. Numerous modern studies have addressed the issue of Aurangzeb's religious policies, although the standard scholarly account of Aurangzeb's reign as a whole is still Sir Jadunath Sarkar's five-volume *History of Aurangzib*, originally published in the years 1912-24. Sarkar's analysis is based on the assumption, common to the historiography of the time, that the ruler's personality was paramount in determining imperial policy and practice. Sarkar sees Aurangzeb as a sincerely pious though overly zealous Muslim whose narrowness of vision made him incapable of choosing a rational and tolerant ruling ideology. In Sarkar's view, it is the very authenticity of Aurangzeb's religiosity that prevented him from ruling wisely, with the emperor's blind devotion to Islam rendering him incapable of adjustment to the diverse socio-religious make-up of India.[46] Ultimately, Sarkar argues that Islamic societies are inherently antagonistic to Hinduism. His study of

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[45] *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 173.

[46] *History of Aurangzib*, 5 vols. (Calcutta, 1912-24); see esp. vol. 3, chapters 4-5.

Aurangzeb argues that Muslims and Hindus, in a timeless pattern, constitute distinct "societies," "sects," "classes," and even "races," while he claims that Islam itself is inherently incompatible with the religion of the Hindus.[47] Sarkar thus concludes that these religious traditions in India have always constituted distinct communities whose "polar difference in their outlook upon life made a fusion between Hindus and Muslims impossible."[48]

Satish Chandra has offered a cogent critique of Sarkar's explanation of Aurangzeb's religious policies, one that questions Sarkar's depiction of Aurangzeb's character and policy as being impervious to historical pressures and forces.[49] Chandra rejects Sarkar's argument that Aurangzeb's personal religious beliefs were the primary determining factor behind the emperor's various discriminatory moves, instead arguing that a "dialectical framework" is more appropriate for understanding the nature of Mughal religious policy. Chandra thus argues that the dictates of Aurangzeb's personal faith need to be seen as having been in constant interaction with the interests of other power-wielding groups in the empire, as well as with the vicissitudes of imperial politico-military power. In essence Chandra argues that Aurangzeb possessed a latent tendency toward a strict, legalist interpretation of Islam, but this inclination was only activated and transformed into effective state policy when the Mughals faced political crises, and not otherwise. In doing so, argues Chandra, one is able to take into account

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[47] Sarkar writes that "The history of the world under Muslim rule illustrates how theology has repeatedly prevailed over political wisdom." *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 166.

[48] *Ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 370-71.

[49] *Mughal Religious Policies*, pp. 170-89.

the significant role of powerful social and political forces upon Mughal imperial policy. In particular, the crisis of empire brought about by Maratha and Rajput rebellion compelled Aurangzeb to respond with those policies which targeted the practices and institutions of non-Muslims. Thus, for example, Chandra writes that "the reimposition of the jizyah was an attempt on Aurangzeb's part to rally Muslim public opinion behind him" in an effort to reinforce his control over the empire, and the author emphasizes the influence of the *ulama* and Muslim nobles in pressing Aurangzeb to promote a stricter form of Islam.[50] Chandra also makes the claim that there were distinct stages in Aurangzeb's religious policy, where changes in the political and economic realms after 1687 induced a move away from the more repressive aspects of the emperor's handling of religious issues. In a reversal of Sarkar's argument that Aurangzeb's sincere personal piety led to unwise policy, Chandra concludes that Aurangzeb manipulated religion to forward his underlying political agenda.[51]

A more recent study also address Aurangzeb's religious edicts, although with a focus upon only one, albeit very contentious, element of these policies, that of temple destruction.[52] Richard Eaton has argued that Aurangzeb targeted for attack only those Hindu temples with a clear role in providing political legitimacy for kingdoms on the frontier of conquest by the Islamic state, as well as those kings rebelling within the

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[50] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[52] This should be distinguished from iconoclasm.

imperial domains.[53] In his analysis of temple desecration during the Sultanate and Mughal periods, Eaton concludes that only those Hindu temples with a clear role in providing political legitimacy for either kingdoms on the frontier of conquest by the Islamic state, or those rebelling within the empire were targeted for attack. When Aurangzeb ordered the destruction of major temples, he often had mosques constructed on the site, usually with materials taken from the temples themselves. For Aurangzeb, the mosque stood as the architectural representation of imperial authority. He understood that temples were centers where his penultimate authority was implicitly challenged.

That mosques built at the behest of Aurangzeb represented imperial power is attested to by the fact that in anti-Mughal rebellions, mosques were sometimes targeted for destruction. Participants in the Satnami rebellion during Aurangzeb's reign destroyed mosques in the district of Narnaul, in the process of establishing an independent administration.[54] Also during Aurangzeb's reign, during the Rajput rebellion of Udaipur, mosques were destroyed in Ahmed Nagar by a local raja.[55] After Aurangzeb ordered the destruction of a Sikh temple in Sirhind, and had a mosque built in its place, the local Sikhs retaliated by pulling the mosque down in turn.[56] Prannath's verse directly associates mosques with imperial expansion, and he also records

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[53] Richard Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States", in *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, (Oxford, 2000); Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*, comes to similar conclusions; pp. 252ff.

[54] Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, vol. 3, p. 198.

[55] Sharma, *Religious Policy*, pp. 135-36.

[56] J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 71.

retaliation for the destruction of temples by attacking mosques.[57] But while Eaton's conclusion regarding temple destruction help to explain the political motivation for this aspect of Aurangzeb's rule, they do not address other significant elements of the emperor's religious policy which cannot be readily understood as part of his political or military objectives, including the reimposition of the *jiziya*, the banning of religious festivals, and the discriminatory tax on Hindu traders. On these issues, following Sarkar, the assumption behind many studies is that Aurangzeb's policies flowed only out of his "puritanical" interpretation of Islam. A closer examination of the impact of these policies, however, reveals that they were no less "rational" than was the strategy of temple destruction. These actions in fact also represent a response by the emperor to particular problems faced by the Mughal state. Here I will take a closer look at one specific incident that occurred in response to the imposition of the *jiziya* tax.

Developments surrounding the reimposition of this tax are narrated in Khafi Khan's *Muntakhab al-Lubab*, a near-contemporary chronicle of Aurangzeb's rule. In the twenty-second year of Aurangzeb's reign (1679) the emperor is reported to have imposed the *jiziya* in order to "suppress the infidels, and make clear the distinction between a land of unbelief and the submission to Islam..." When the news spread of this order to collect the *jiziya*:

> "all the Hindus of the capital [Delhi] and many of them from the surrounding territories gathered in lakhs on the bank of the river below the Jharukah and made a request for its withdrawal, weeping and crying. The Emperor did not pay any heed to their appeals. When the Emperor came out for the Jum'ah prayers, the Hindus crowded in from the gate of the fort to the Jami Masjid in such large number for imploring redress that the passage of the people was blocked. The money-lenders, cloth-merchants

[57] See appendix.

and shopkeepers of the camp Urdu Bazar (Army Market) and all the artisans of the city abandoned their work and assembled on the route of the Emperor. In spite of strict orders for arrangements owing to which the hands and feet of many were broken, the Emperor who was riding on an elephant could not reach the mosque. Every moment the number of those unlucky people increased. Then he ordered that the majestic elephants should proceed against them. For some days more, they assembled in the same way and requested remission (of the Jiziyah). At last they submitted to pay the Jiziyah."[58]

The fact that the chronicle mentions that this protest was undertaken by "money-lenders, cloth-merchants and shopkeepers" as well as artisans is significant. In fact, the central role in protests played by such groups against the *jiziya* tax as well as other religious edicts of Aurangzeb is specifically and repeatedly mentioned in historical documents written during the emperor's reign. As noted by Satish Chandra, "Politically, the greatest objection to jizyah was that it harassed and alienated some of the most influential sections of the Hindus, namely the urban masses, particularly the rapidly growing class of merchants, shop-keepers, financiers, etc., who occupied an increasingly important place in the social and economic life of the country."[59] This indicates that many of these edicts targeted participants in the commercial economy. Thus while agreeing with the argument by Chandra, Eaton, and Asher that there was a clear political element to Aurangzeb's religious policies, I would add that in the late-Mughal period, an additional, if less direct, challenge to traditional imperial authority came from economic as well as from political developments. To the degree that commercial communities involved in the market economy were not integrated into the Mughal state system, they became vulnerable to the capricious and sometimes predatory

[58] Khafi Khan, *Muntakhab al-Lubab*, tr. S. Moinul Haq.

[59] Chandra, *Mughal Religious Policies*, pp. 182-83.

actions of Mughal elites. Consequently, these groups expressed their aspirations by funding the construction of temples, supporting large religious festivals, and providing patronage for religious leaders and the production of texts. In this regard, the connection between religious pilgrimage and fairs and mercantile activity was a fact commonly observed by contemporaries. It was when these developments created, on a large-scale, an alternative locus for the loyalties of imperial subjects that they appeared as a threat to Mughal sovereignty. And it is at this point that Aurangzeb took measures, in the name of Islam, to contain or suppress such a threat.

Mahamat Prannath: from dialogue to opposition

There are many conspicuous similarities in the bhakti traditions of Dadu Dayal and Prannath. Both figures composed devotional poetry in vernacular dialects which criticized caste, and gave a prominent place to commercial metaphors. Both railed against Hindu and Islamic orthodoxy and ritualism, and in doing so, frequently employed sufi concepts and idioms. Each *bhakta* established a *sampradaya* with a significant number of merchant devotees, banias in particular.[60] And head disciples in both movements – each a merchant turned ascetic - produced religious biographies in order to eulogize the life and achievements of their respective leaders. A comparison of the *Janmlila,* Dadu's hagiography, and the *Bitak* of Prannath also reveals similarities in narrative structure and religious values. As one would expect of any hagiography, both works highlight the pious behavior of their respective *sant*s, a trait which invariably

[60] Merchant devotees of Dadu are mentioned in sections 8.21, and 15.6.1; 13.4: Dadu housed by a merchant. 7.12.

attracts the good and repulses the wicked with whom they come into contact. Of particular interest, however, is a another theme shared by the *Janmlila* and the *Bitak*, namely the interaction of the saintly protagonist with actual political rulers of their time. From the point of view of their respective hagiographers, both Dadu and Prannath expressed an interest in meeting with the contemporary Mughal emperor, Akbar in the former case, Aurangzeb in the latter. But the portrayal of sharply different experiences by the two *sant*s is also significant in that it reveals how the political and religious climate, at least as experienced by mercantile devotionalist sects, had radically changed in the course of the seventeenth century, from a welcoming to a hostile environment.

According to his religious biography, Prannath initially attempted to gain a place in the imperial system, in an undertaking reminiscent of the Jain monks as well as of Dadu Dayal. Prohibited from gaining an audience with Aurangzeb, however, Prannath became progressively more vehement in his attacks on Aurangzeb and Mughal officials, as appears in his devotional poems of this period. Beginning with the *prakaran* 32, the *Bitak* focuses on Prannath's attempts to enlighten Aurangzeb about the true nature of Islam. There seems to be little reason to doubt the historical veracity of the *Bitak*'s subsequent narration of the incidents surrounding this mission concerning the activities of Prannath, insofar as this pertains to the identification of followers and visitors, the listing of places and dates of his travel, and the descriptions of daily activities such as religious discussions and the making of arrangements for food and lodging. The authenticity of the presentation of events directly concerning the interactions of the devotees with imperial officials, however, is less certain. Regardless of this difficulty,

the story told in the *Bitak* is useful in that it elucidates the process by which a significant mercantile sect became alienated from Mughal rule, and consequently moved into a territory that was home to a rebellious regional power.

Once he had arrived in Delhi, Prannath was joined by followers from Surat, Thatta, and elsewhere. Two of his devotees, Govardhan and Garibdas, meet in the Urdu bazaar.[61] Staying in the *haveli*s of his close devotees, the leader wrote a document concerning the proper interpretation of the Quran, which he intended to have passed on to the emperor. One devotee questions the entire undertaking, saying,

> He [Aurangzeb] will always be an enemy of Hindus. So why read to him this
> Hindawi letter?
> The *shariat* is powerful, he is a rigid Muslim.[62]
>
> Then [Prannath] again began to think of how to give message to the sultan.
> This agent of satan (*amal saitan*) should not remain over the homeland.[63]

Due to further unspecified "commotion," many people are reported to have died. After a month, Prannath set off for the pilgrimage center of Hardwar, located about 100 miles north of Delhi, for the Kumbh Mela religious fair. Hardwar hosted the massive Kumbh Mela once every twelve years, and Prannath attended the festival in 1678, staying there for four months.[64] The *Bitak* notes that "at that time sectarian divisions had become entrenched" and in response Prannath, as an incarnation of God [*budh ishwar*] had appeared. Identifying four different *sampradayas* (the Ramanuj, Nimanuj,

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[61] *Bitak*, *pr*. 34, *ch*. 24.

[62] *Ibid.*, *pr*. 34 *ch*. 33.

[63] *Ibid.*, *pr*. 34, ch. 54.

[64] *Ibid.*, *pr*. 35.

Vishnu Syam, and Madhavi), six schools of philosophy, the four *varnas*, and other religious orders, Prannath proceeded to interrogate each about the nature of their respective theological beliefs, their deities, mantras, scriptures, places of pilgrimage, and so forth. After identifying the erroneous beliefs of each tradition, Prannath then elaborates on the true nature of God and the universe, in the process interpreting various verses from puranas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagwad Gita, which are cited in the *Bitak* in Sanskrit. The *sant* ends by proclaiming the fulfillment of God's word and the arrival of the one true teaching, that of his Nijdham (Nijanand) *sampradaya*.

Prannath then returned to Delhi to meet with his devotees, where they assembled in the Shahganj market area to discuss how to reach Aurangzeb with their religious message. The incident, occurring in 1679 in the vicinity of the imperial court, seems almost certainly to be a reference to the time of Aurangzeb's reimposition of the *jiziya*, discussed above. Prannath proceeded to one of the central gates of Delhi, the Lal Darwaza, and as he preached about the prophet and God (*nabi aur narayan*) a large crowd gathered to listen, so that "no Hindu stayed home." Prannath proclaimed to them:

> I look at you, people without a head
> [the emperor's ?] ears have lost their hearing, [but] this *jimmi* [*dhimmi*]sees you
>
> The agent [*amil*] of Aurangzeb, the agent of the Shariat
> If you fight with them, this folly won't be standing tomorrow.[65]

Prannath's next tells Lal Das and Govardhan to discuss the matter with a mulla, and Lal Das responds by expressing his fear of Muslims, as he had "heard of Aurangzeb's

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[65] *Ibid.*, *pr.* 38, *chs.* 13-14.

rigidity." Prannath continues to move around the areas of Chandni Chowk and Lal Darwaza, lodging in the *haveli*s of disciples. The *Bitak* tells us that Prannath and his followers attempted to enlist five of the emperor's courtiers to help with their task of communicating with the emperor. Letters are prepared and delivered to each of the *mansabdars*, who are identified by name: Kazi Shaikh Islam, Razavi Khan, Amir Aqil Khan, Shaikh Nizam, and Kotwal Siddi Faulad. All five officials, however, refuse to have anything to do with the devotees' plan. As a next step, twelve of Prannath's disciples walked to the Jumah Masjid where Aurangzeb went for his Friday prayers, and sang out loud the verses of the *Sanandh*. The sect members also leave a note at the mosque which is picked up by a Mughal officer and delivered to Aurangzeb. Hearing of the note, the emperor, however, becomes enraged and demotes the officer, reducing his *mansab* by a rank of 200. The devotees return to sing again at the Jumah Masjid, and finally succeed in getting the emperor's attention. The devotees read out some verses to Aurangzeb, who then asks them questions about their claims. But in the end, due to the his rigidity and the fact that he is the *dajjal*, the emperor refuses to meet with Prannath in person.

After these events the *Bitak* cites an *ayat* from the Quran, and presents an esoteric interpretation of the material. The *Bitak* shows Prannath proclaiming that after 990 year and 9 months, *Ruh Allah* will come to fight the *dajjal*.[66] (Calculated from the time of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, according to the Hijri calendar, this works out to 1581 A.D., the year of Devchandra's birth). This battle will last for 120 years

[66] *Ibid.*, *pr.* 45, *ch.* 13.

before the great deceiver is finally defeated. Prannath subsequently leaves Delhi and travels through a number of cities and towns including Sanganer and Udaipur in Rajasthan, Ujjain in Malwa, and Burhanpur and Aurangabad in the Deccan, meeting with disciples and discussing means of opposing the emperor. In Ramnagar one Surat Singh hears Prannath's discourse, and brings Devkaran, a cousin and *diwan* of Maharaja Chhatrasal, to meet Prannath. Devkaran then arranges a meeting between Prannath and Maharaja Chhatrasal in the jungle near Mau, in Bundelkhand, in 1683. The king is stupefied upon meeting Prannath, and becomes his disciple. Chhatrasal at this point also mentions that he has for twelve years been the "servant" [*chakar*] of one whose image is imprinted on a rupee that he shows to Prannath.[67] This date, 1671, would correspond to the year that Chhatrasal had gone into rebellion against the Mughals. While the identity of the imprint is never clarified, one can speculate that the coin was from the mint of Shivaji Bhonsle, the Maratha rebel with whom Chhatrasal had met in the Deccan in 1667.[68]

The *Bitak* next notes that Chhatrasal was at the time preparing to fight a campaign by Sher Afghan (a Mughal *faujdar*), and Prannath therefore tied a cloth around Chhatrasal's head and blessed him for battle, and the king's subsequent victory is accredited to Prannath's intervention. At Chhatrasal's invitation Prannath then settles in his capital, Panna. After various rituals and offerings are made to Prannath, a consecration ceremony for Chhatrasal is conducted, whereupon Prannath declares him

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[67] *Ibid., pr.* 60, *ch.* 27.

[68] J. N. Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times* (Calcutta, 1920), p. 180.

to be the sovereign [*chatta*] from whom all other sultans now hide.[69] Learning of Prannath's claim to esoteric mastery of the Quran, Chhatrasal asks what should be done with the Muslims in his kingdom, suggesting that he might bring them to obey Prannath's command. Questions also arise from those who wonder "why a Hindu is interpreting" scriptures in this manner. To this end "qazis, mullas and pandits" are brought to the capital to discuss matters with the *sant*.[70] Prannath proceeds to question a qazi brought in from the town of Mahoba, then displays his superior exegesis of the Quran, whereupon the *diwan* declares that the qazi has been defeated and discharges him. The qazi then accepts Prannath as his preceptor, and upon the *diwan*'s demand, takes an oath to this effect. Following this episode, a number of Hindu pandits are called in to hear Prannath's discussion of the Bhagwat Purana, after which they claim that Prannath's interpretation is based on a lie. With this Chhatrasal becomes enraged at the pandits, and announces that henceforth no Bundela will have them as gurus, and if any person of the "Bundela *jati*" allows the pandits to tie a strip of cloth to his head, that person will not manage to rise to power.[71] The *Bitak* proclaims that in this way the pandits were all defeated, and "Islam was victorious". Finally, the *Bitak* comes to a close, discussing the devotion of Prannath's disciples, and prescribes the proper forms of worship.

Maharaja Chhatrasal and the Bundelas

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[69] *Bitak., pr.* 60, *chs.* 67-68.

[70] *Ibid., pr.* 60, *chs.* 92-93.

[71] *Ibid., pr.* 60, *chs.* 127-28.

Prannath's royal disciple, Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundela (1649-1731), belonged to what Dirk Kolff has called an upstart, "spurious" Rajput clan, a community which was prevented from marrying into older, more prestigious Rajput lineages based in territories located to the west and north of Bundelkhand.[72] Unlike the Rajputs of Rajasthan, the Bundelas were never fully incorporated into the Mughal empire, although many individual warriors periodically served as *mansabdars*. The Bundelas first rose to prominence with Rudra Pratap Singh's establishment of a new throne in Orchha in 1531. Rudra Pratap's efforts represented an attempt to "win a share of the prizes of the big politics of Hindustan," a development accompanied by a shift of patronage from Shaivism to Vaishnavism further representing their "move toward participation in all-India concerns."[73] During Akbar's reign the Mughals managed to bring the Bundelas into a tributary relationship with the empire, while, like the Rajputs of Rajasthan, Bundela chieftains used their positions in imperial service to expand their own patrimonies at the expense neighboring powers. At the same time, the Mughals made periodic attempts to increase central control over the densely forested region of Bundelkhand, through military campaigns against recalcitrant rajas, as well as the assignation of Bundela *mansabdars* to areas outside of their homelands, in order to prevent them from consolidating forces there.[74] When Akbar died in 1605, the Bundela raja Bir Singh Deo lent his support to Prince Salim, the future emperor Jahangir, against

[72] Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge, 1990),

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 121.

[74] See William Irvine, *Later Mughals*, pp. 220, 223-24, 229-30.

the rival princes. Once in power, Jahangir intervened in Bundela politics, promoting Bir Singh over other candidates to the throne, thereby allowing the raja to consolidate his position and amass great wealth. After both Jahangir and Bir Singh died in 1627, Bir Singh's son Jujhar Singh violated imperial protocol by taking unauthorized leave from the Mughal capital, and in response Shah Jahan sent a large military force into Bundelkhand.[75] Shah Jahan then installed his chosen candidate, Devi Singh Bundela, on the throne at Orchha. Under Shah Jahan's direction, imperial forces "imposed a new, more intense, level of Mughal political domination in Bundelkhand."[76]

As various Bundela rulers competed for dominance in Bundelkhand, Raja Champatrai of Mahoba, father of Chhatrasal, managed to gain prominence, as he moved in and out of Mughal service under Shah Jahan. In the subsequent Mughal war of succession, Champatrai sided with prince Aurangzeb, fighting in battles against the forces of Dara Shikoh. After Aurangzeb's final victory, Champatrai again left Mughal service, and returned to Bundelkhand to resume his raiding activity. Mughal forces pursued Champatrai, and in 1662 he was defeated, and his decapitated head was sent to the emperor. Chhatrasal followed in the footsteps of his father, constantly shifting between periods of imperial service and those of rebellion, always negotiating to increase his power.[77] Chhatrasal first entered Mughal service in 1665, enrolling under Raja Jaisingh of Amer, gaining a small mansab rank of 250 *zat*, 100 *sawar*, and fighting against Shivaji and the Marathas. By 1671, however, Chhatrasal was back in

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[75] B.R. Andhere, *Bundelkhand Under the Marathas (1720-1818 A.D.)* (Nagpur, 1984), pp. 4-5.

[76] Richards, *Mughal Empire*, p. 130.

Bundelkhand, and his plundering activities spurred Aurangzeb to send a series of *faujdari* forces against him. Capturing numerous towns in Bundelkhand, Chhatrasal made Panna his capital, but posted his army at Mau. In 1677 Chhatrasal ceased his aggressions and concentrated on the consolidation of his kingdom, fending off a series of Mughal military campaigns. In 1679 negotiations between the Maharaja and the Mughals failed, but terms were subsequently reached in 1681.

Aurangzeb's distraction in the Deccan at this time, however, led to a loosening of imperial concern with and control over Bundelkhand, creating a space for a Chhatrasal to gain autonomy.[78] From this time until Aurangzeb's death, Chhatrasal increased his control over Bundela territories, even forcing Mughal *faujdar*s to make *chauth* payments. According to Ravindra K. Jain, Chhatrasal now aspired to full-blown territorial kingship, not just the pursuit of raids and plunder, and aimed to found a royal lineage. Jain argues that "there exists a strong correlation between, on the one hand, forested, rocky and secluded regions and, on the other, the dominance in such regions of sectarian and charismatic holy men (rather than Brahmans), who articulate and legitimise the rebellious and anti-establishment 'rule' by warriors and upstarts."[79] Prannath's consecration of Chhatrasal, argues Jain, represents an example of this phenomenon. In addition to this, the settling of Prannath with his merchant followers offered an economic boon for the kingdom.

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[77] Bhagwan Das Gupta, *Life and Times of Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundela* (New Delhi, 1980).

[78] Irvine, *Later Mughals*, p. 229.

[79] Ravindra K. Jain, *Between History and Legend: Status and Power in Bundelkhand* (New Delhi, 2002), pp. 47-48.

Conclusion

The hagiographies examined in this chapter bear witness to the efforts by mercantile sects to establish and maintain secure relations with the Mughal rulers. As the case of the Jains amply illustrates, success in this endeavor generated a host of concrete protections and benefits for the religious community, in addition to the less tangible but certainly equally reassuring circumstance of having one's top leaders placed in a position of honor and respect at the imperial court. Akbar's systematic incorporation of renunciant leaders into court ritual provided a clear demonstration of their exalted position in the imperial system, and hagiographical depictions of these events enshrined them as a paradigmatic model of relations with political rulers. The *Janmlila* indicates that the merchant sect of Dadu Dayal was accepted at the courts of both regional and imperial rulers at a time when the Rajput principalities were themselves being incorporated into the Mughal administrative framework. Akbar's tolerant religious outlook greatly facilitated this process, thereby gaining for the fledgling empire access to both military manpower and economic resources. The *Bitak*, on the other hand, reveals that in a period when Mughal success led to the enrichment of nobles who were then emboldened to contest the center's authority, Aurangzeb's restructuring of Mughal political culture to favor an exclusivist Sunni Islam helped push mercantile groups into the hands of regional kings who rejected Mughal paramountcy. Despite the differences in the experience of the three religious groups examined above, all have recorded in their hagiographies a need to struggle to displace Brahman communities entrenched in both regional and Mughal courts. The opposition of these

Brahman groups can to some degree be interpreted as a resistance to the political ascendance of religious communities who owed their success to the immense resources amassed by their merchant lay-followers through participation in the expansive market economy.

Aurangzeb's promulgation of an exclusivist form of Islam as imperial policy should in turn be understood in the context of his overall effort to centralize and buttress the authority and stability of the Mughal empire. His policies were not, as has often been claimed, due to either a supposed essential antagonism of Islam toward Hinduism, nor to an effort to appeal to a unified, pan-Indian "Muslim public opinion," but instead arose, at least in part, from reasons of state. Aurangzeb's religious policies represented a response to the particular dilemmas and issues he faced in attempting to centralize Mughal administrative control. While these policies were rooted in an Islamic notion of sovereignty, the particular form they took was due not to an essential impulse of Islam, but rather to the emperor's perceptions of how best to deal with a series of challenges to imperial control and authority. The notion that Islamic policy might be useful in retarding this process was explicitly acknowledged in the early eighteenth century by the Naqshabandi leader Shah Walliullah, who advised the Mughal emperor to "impose heavy kharaj and jizya" as a means of weakening the power of rebellious "tributary chiefs".[80]

The weakening of Mughal authority and the concomitant willingness of regional powers to assert independence to a greater or lesser degree, depended in large part upon

[80] Quoted in Muhammad Umar, Islam in Northern India During the Eighteenth Century (New Delhi, 1993) p. 45, fn. 74

the continued viability of regional economies and access to sources of wealth. In the late-Mughal period, this viability hinged upon the maintenance of inter-regional commerce. Speaking generally about such circumstances in Mughal India, Muzaffar Alam has written that "As the region developed and *its economic ties with other regions appeared to be strong enough to be sustained*, the regional elements began to struggle for greater exercise of power."[81] By the early eighteenth century, mercantile groups had managed to assume a greater degree of control of bureaucratic positions in both the Mughal and in regional administrations. This development was lamented by the standard-bearers of the traditional system, such as Bhimsen, who in1720 complained that "In the present age unprofessional men having learnt the art of arithmetic have become masters of authority, and engaged in plundering the public."[82] For the newcomers, of course, this transformation was a welcome change, and signaled the assertion of mercantile values, as reflected in the *Safarnama* of Anand Ram Mukhlis, when he proclaimed that "Trade is many times better than nobility: Nobility makes one subject while in (the profession of) trade one leads the life of a ruler. The wealth accumulated by a noble is a misfortune whereas the money earned in trade is lawfully enjoyable."[83]

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[81] Emphasis added, Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India : Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-48* (Delhi, 1986), p. 93. See also C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 5-6.

[82] *Tarikh-i Dilkusha*, tr. Jadunath Sarkar.

[83] Quoted in Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of the Mughal Empire: Awadh and the Punjab* (Oxford, 1986), p. 174, fn. 154.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has addressed several interrelated issues currently of central concern in research on early modern South Asian history. This includes debates concerning the nature of the Mughal empire's efforts toward administrative centralization and subsequent imperial decline, the role and impact of commercialization and trade, and the social import of religious traditions. Recent research on these and related questions has brought to light a great deal of historical documentation related to these issues in Mughal India, and sophisticated analyses of this data have broadened our understanding of these topics. The present study contributes to this debate by offering an innovative explanation of the relationship between devotional religious movements and merchants and the commercial economy in the Mughal empire. My central contention is that the nature of the expansion of a market economy, and the response of the state to this growth, can be better understood through an examination ofdocuments related to the burgeoning devotional groups of the period. For the present study I have made use of sources which have been underutilized for the study of state and economy in the Mughal period. In existing studies of the market economy of precolonial India, it is frequently observed that indigenous primary sources are scarce and inadequate. Indian merchants did not keep the kind of detailed records of commercial transactions which modern economic historians require to reconstruct the structure and operation of the economy. In this work I have demonstrated how documents which have been traditionally primarily valued for what

they reveal about religious life can be used to shed light on political and economic history as well.

I have argued that devotional religious traditions played a central, but often oveloooked role in the development of the market, in struggles over group status and identity, and in processes of political representation during the period of Mughal rule. Devotional movements became, in a period of rapid commercialization and social flux, popular associations that both promoted and responded to the position of upwardly mobile groups from a variety of religious backgrounds. In doing so, these movements embodied an emergent collective identity, one marked by religious inclusivism and opposition to the caste system. The leaders of these groups also served as the representatives through whom followers sought to convey their interests to the imperial establishment. In their interactions with Mughal officials, such leaders also mediated the exercise of imperial sovereignty to their devotees, while simultaneously representing the devotional group's loyalty to the empire.

In their teachings, devotional movements openly challenged the stifling hegemony of the hierarchical caste system, and attacked its restrictions on interaction between people of different social backgrounds, a necessary prerequisite for the expansion of groups involved in a market economy. Devotional leaders also inculcated a work ethic among their followers, and placed a higher value on achieved, as opposed to hereditary, status. These movements further helped develop the institutional basis for a market economy, promoting trade as a concomitant to the encouragement of pilgrimage, and established links between merchants living in geographically dispersed

areas. Devotional leaders frequently made demands for the protection of their followers' interests against any arbitrary depredations of imperial officials, and gained recognition of their status and rights. This effort conflicted, however, with the late-imperial drive for the centralization of power, as the state attempted to extend and deepen its administrative control over the political and economic spheres.

In the final chapters I have attempted to help clarify a subject of long-standing controversy among historians of Mughal India. In conventional scholarly accounts, the decline of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Mughal Empire was hastened due to the emperor Aurangzeb's notorious intolerance and zealous persecution of any group - Hindu, Muslim, and other – as part of his efforts to implement his strict interpretation of Sunni orthodoxy. Historians have portrayed the emperor's religious predilections as due to either the supposedly inherent intolerance of Islam, or alternately as representing a religious "gloss" cynically masking underlying political motives. I have argued that these explanations are unsatisfactory because, in the first instance, numerous devotional figures invoked alternative Islamic traditions in their opposition to Aurangzeb's policies, instead promoting a deeply tolerant, inclusivist, and highly inquisitive version of their religion. At the same time, the historical sources give no reason to doubt that Aurangzeb and his officials' were anything less than sincere in their belief about the correctness of their interpretation of Islam. Rather, Mughal centralization was under his rule carried out within a framework of an absolutist ideology expressed in a specifically Indo-Islamic form, with expectations that should adhere to the officially prescribed version of orthodox Sunni Islam. In this situation, the heterodox and inclusivist beliefs

of the devotional movements, which combined elements of Islamic and Hindu traditions, remained unassimilable into the state's administrative apparatus. The result was a doomed attempt by Mughal officials to impose throughout the empire to implement a restrictive religious policy in an effort undermine the political and economic forces based in the provinces. This in turn provoked many leaders into shifting their, and their followers', allegiances to the post-Mughal successor states, whereupon devotional movements were able to be integrated into the various regional polities.

APPENDIX ONE

Excerpts from *Khilvat, Prakaran* 11

1. The opening of the souls' truth,
 this is the true love of the souls
 this is the secret merging of the Abode,
 those in this world do not have the wisdom of the annihilation of the ego

2. The great soul together with these souls,
 talked with God [*haq*]
 We are your Lovers,
 we exist in your love

3. The great soul said you are all truth-tellers,
 my work is [only] that of love
 the original God and these souls,
 in this love is my happiness

4. Then he answered these souls,
 God gave this wisdom
 This love is your good fortune,
 but I am your Lover

5. God is the great soul's Lover,
 and the Lover of these souls
 How can one speak of this love with simple words?
 God is these people's Lover

6. These souls should be the Lovers of God, and Lovers of the great soul
 And the great soul too is the Lover of God, this proper unified love

9. Then the light of an organ of God,
 this is the glorious light
 Then it was born in his heart,
 look at the light of the divine

10. How much he loves the great soul,
 how much he loves the companion souls
 The great soul loves God,
 how much they all love God

13. They are told of unity,
 body and mind in one love

Not a hint of separation,
unity without doubt

14. So togetherness is never obtained,
in the abode is unity
When love is together,
there is no thought of separation

16. Separation in eternal abode
is not even dreamed of
So the unity of God's love,
how do the believers get it?

17. God told these souls,
I will show you love
This unity of love
you will obtain without a doubt

18. I will hide you,
you sit and grab [my] feet
You will attain it through love,
you will come meet me

19. You will obtain this love,
but first you will have forgotten me
You will remain separated,
then I will send a Messenger [*rasul*] to you

20. I will send scriptures [*kitabat*] to you,
with all the truth [*hakikat*]
You will ask,
which lord sent these books?

21. So where is our lord,
what kind of play is this, who are we?
I will send a messenger to you,
but you will not obey

22. Where is our homeland [*watan*],
whose place and home?
Why have we come here,
is there any place without heaven?

23. You will read all the words,

which I will write as proof
You will take this to heart,
but you will not be released from the confusion

25. You will go on in this deceitful game,
you will remain in separated homes
I will give you knowledge of the abode,
but you will not awaken

28. I will show the sorrow of this game,
I will remind [you] of happiness
I will give [you] all the words,
but you will not be able to let go of sorrow

32. We cannot be without you,
we cannot manage for even a moment
Why would we be so foolish,
as to do something so wrong?

33. Just as the Lord says,
we shall never do such a thing
Even if you saw us try one hundred times,
believers [*momin*] could not do this

34. To forget you or your true path,
or to forget the real home
Why would they do
such a very foolish thing?

35. This came to the heart of these souls,
is any game finer?
Seeing the game they became forgetfull of you
and the true homeland

36. The more they thought about return,
the more their hearts desired the game
Whirling around, they demanded the game,
some were set upon this

37. No thought was given to how this would end,
so God told of the future
He said that the game is a sorrowful separation,
think carefully about your demand

38. God, truth is yours,
    all is filled with the light of your wisdom
[But] what the hearts desires so much,
    for the sake of the feeling mentioned above

39. They murmed be careful,
    God is going to show us the game of separation
They faced one another,
    and remained in an embrace

40. [They asked] why would we become separated?
    We won't let go of each other
Why would we forget God,
    we remain remain in *khilvat*

41. God said, "You will forget
    this state of eternal existence [*baka*]
"You will forget me, too,
    once you see the game you will remain there"

42. [They responded] why would this happen to us?
    Why would we be so unaware?
We may see millions of false games,
    but why would we forget the Lord?"

43. These souls said to one another,
    "please be careful
He will show us the game,
    do not forget God"

44. "If you forget,
    I will immediately awaken you
If I forget,
    please tell me right then

45. In this way,
    each advised the other
Whatever happens in the false game,
    we beleivers are all one body

46. So why would we forget this warning,
    this caution about the future?
We will look at the game with consciouness,
    we are determined not to forget

47. So why should we forget,
when we have this love?
We won't be separated for a fraction of a moment;
how could we bear it?

48. All these souls are filled with love,
they are completely unified
Why would these souls let even a little separation
come between them and the Lord?

49. This was discussed in the abode,
these souls mention God
Those who were present in the eternal abode,
why would they become distanced from God?

50. In the supreme abode,
love was a lofty subject
In forgetting about love,
the Lord showed them separation

52. You sat in their hearts,
the 12,000 [souls] above
This forgetfullness will be ridiculed,
whoever did not recall God

APPENDIX TWO

Excerpts from *Kirantan*, *Prakaran* 108

22. Those who take hold of the Quran's inner-wealth
ascertain its true meaning
This indeed is the worship of the special people
who know the Homeland with heart and soul

23. Such lovers never cease
to desire the heavenly abode
They care for the Lord and their fellow believers
this indeed is their devotion

24. This indeed is the devotion of these souls
those called the special community
These indeed are people of the Book
as is written in the Quran's second chapter

25. Now look at those devoted to *this* world
this too is mentioned in that chapter
I will describe in detail these people too
those who sit facing the qibla

26. Emperors know only this:
pearls, jewels, and crown
This indeed is their qibla
they want to expand their kingdom

27. They want to fill their warehouses
with the world's gold and its silver coins
This indeed is their qibla
attained by any means

28. Such ill-natured people
put their mind to their own good
This indeed is their qibla
they care not for the good of others

29. Those who worship the surface
desire earth, water, and stone
This indeed is their qibla
that surface upon which their gaze falls

30. They build with earth and stone
and call it the house of God
They've made a meherab in the qibla
to which the say namaz

31. Their body is their friend
They eat well and [live] in comfort
This indeed is their qibla
they want nothing else

32. In their own eyes they are very wise
they neither see nor speak of anything else
This indeed is their qibla
they pull everything inward

33. Whatever qibla one worships
this comes in front of one's eyes
If you loses the true religion for the sake of this world
then it is said you will burn in the endtime

34. In this way the Message has been given
it's been told out in the open
The enemy that resides within
gives a perverse meaning

35. Those that you call devout
are great men of religion
It is said that rejection of the Guide
is the way to lose faith

36. When the surface meanings are taken
then religious structures are set up
The inner-meaning has vanished
so why bother reading at all?

37. They read scriptures to fill their bellies
and to support their families
Showing the ways of this world
they follow their eyes

38. When the inner-meaning is understood
then there is nothing but the Lord
Without the Lord all is hell
the fourteen worlds on fire

39. The essence of the religion of Islam
    is for the sake of happiness
But those great men who've come out on top
    block the path for others

40. It is said that humility is great
    they read it but don't believe
They hurt those that they trap in their clutches
    this is the poverty of the mullas

41. If anyone utters a straightforward word
    then they are publicly ridiculed
If some poor man protests
    he is put to death

42. They say "we are believers [*momin*s]
    and *we* read scriptures all the day long
We are the people of the Book
    We are steadfast believers"

43. How many have come and gone like this, saying "we, we"
    even today this very thing goes on night and day
While they're busy behaving like this, the endtime has come
    and they'll be chained in the fire of repentence

APPPENDIX THREE

Excerpts from *Sanandh, Prakaran* 40

1. It's written in the Book [*kateb*],
   no one has found the eternal Abode [*thaur*]
   Not angels, not prophets
   so how can anyone else find it?

1. The Messenger has written
   saying that it is unobtainable
   As long as there is the [illusory] dream of these fourteen worlds,
   the Lord will remain separate

3. No one can find it themselves;
   now the decree of the judges [*qazi*] is in effect
   They say they whoever wants it,
   we will bring them together

4. The mullas inform themselves by reading,
   from this they become conceited
   They tell the world just this,
   "We read the Quran"

5. They exchange the true religion [*din*] for this world and thus lose it,
   in this manner they pervert the Way
   For the sake of the pleasures of the dream [-world]
   they disgrace themselves through their greed

6. They describe the path to this world,
   they say this is what the Prophet says
   [They say] it is written in the holy command [*furman*],
   [but] these are just games

7. In this deceptive game,
   they cause division with disputes
   One breaks and the second seizes,
   [yet] they say "we are virtuous"

8. Those who are content in one [kind of] dress,
   they beat them to pressure them to remove them
   They cry and beat their heads,
   [yet] they say "we are virtuous"

9. They seize and pull [people] out of one ditch,
then take and put them into another gulf
They force [people] to slaughter animals in the permitted [*halal*] fashion,
[yet] they say "we are virtuous"

10. Hindus burn their dead,
and these [corpses] come to a pit
they come see this and lament,
[yet] they say "we are virtuous"

11. They beat, terrify, and throw [people] down,
they thus cause [people] to weep and wail in grief
in this way they change people's religion [*jatan*],
[yet] they say "we are virtuous"

12. With throats like fish,
they have no limits
They suck you in like this,
[yet] they say "we are virtuous"

13. They tyrannize the poor,
and no one's allowed to complain
They feed the holy community [*sunnat*] meat,
[yet] they say "we are virtuous"

14. Any cruel living thing's who is born,
who subsists on meat and liquor
They take them into the true religion [*din*],
[yet] they say "we are virtuous"

15. They take their riding elephants,
they go and cause destruction
They rejoice playing music,
[yet] they say "we are virtuous"

16. They make unbelievers [*kafir*] into Muslims,
these they count as having taken the true religion [*din*]
They shave their heads and keep a beard,
[yet] they say "we are virtuous"

17. They feed you food,
show you to the mosque's prayer niche [*meherab*]
They make you take the *kalama*,
[yet] they say we are virtuous

18. They throw down one they select,
 one which has always been Hindu
 They demolish [the building] by force,
 [yet] they say "we are virtuous"

19. Hindus [then] demolish mosques,
 challenging the Muslims
 [They say] We are are a credit to the deity,
 they say "we are virtuous"

20. They have no awareness of the deity of the true religion,
 in their mad frenzy of conceit
 In this manner they increase enmity,
 [yet] they say we are virtuous

21. They have become drowned in the delusion of pride,
 and afterwards they lose [the opportunity of] birth
 In this way they pull you to them,
 [yet] they say "we are virtuous"

22. In this way they read and describe the path,
 playing in the dream
 They expose [their] oppression,
 [yet] they say "we are virtuous"

23. But the virtuous are those to whom
 all living creatures, big and small
 Are seen as one,
 all are beloved by the Lord

24. Whosoever causes anyone sorrow and grief,
 is not a Muslim
 the Prophet of the Muslims,
 took the name of compassion

25. None of them understand Islam,
 nor follow the way of the Prophet
 They understand neither virtue nor devotion,
 [yet] they say "We are Muslims"

26. Whose religion [is this], why follow it,
 and why keep the holy command [furman]
 [They ask] why bring the inner-nature to the outside,

[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

27. No understanding of ritual cleansing and prayer [*wazu namaz*],
nor of the *ramazan* fast
No understanding of the rosary, nor of the Name [of God],
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

28. No understanding of a pure heart,
they don't recognize a [holy] word
No understanding of the way or the Homeland [*watan*],
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

29. [They ask] "Who am I, from where have I come,
what is it I see in this world
Who is the Prophet, who sent him,"
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

30. They never recall the truth,
nor [their] errors
[They say] "We never dream," [yet] they say "We are Muslims"

31. This [place] is a burning fire,
in which they take pleasure
Even when shown something, the blind don't see it,
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

32. They look [only] at the surface,
they don't have inner eyes or ears
So what do they hear, what do they see?
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

33. In this way they see only the outside,
they are unaware of the harm they cause
They do not recognize thing of the spirit,
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

34. They don't see nor speak of virtues,
they take [bad] qualities in their body
You depend only on your [five] senses,
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

35. So many tyrants commit acts of oppression,
[they] shut their eyes in conceit
They're not afraid of shedding blood,

[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

36. They never restrain themselves,
they are born into a deceitful life
Night and day they want to go on in this way,
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

37. Their minds continually fly about,
they don't manage to stay still in God's abode
Thus they create a tumult,
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

38. They stand full of pride,
understanding themselves to be lords of the world
They don't distinguish between the profound and the shallow,
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

39. Their limbs are filled with desire and anger,
meat and liquor are their food and drink
they don't know what God has forbidden [*haram*],
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

40. The dream took place and was made black,
inside the black, life progressed
They cut the throat and drink the blood,
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

41. They don't see others' grief,
their hearts completely like stone
They aren't ashamed to cause others grief,
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

42. Brahmans say "We're the greatest",
Muslims say "We are pure"
Both will be [but] a handful in one place,
one of ash, the other dust

43. They don't remove their own disbelief [*kufar*],
yet see everyone as unbelievers [*kufran*]
They don't see their own bad qualities,
[yet] they say "We are Muslims"

44. Like a man in a dream,
you perceive everything as eternal

Like when you are lost in sleep,
 everything you see mixes together

45. They don't leave their evil ways for a moment,
 they're not afraid of God
They want to gaze at their rewards,
 [yet] they say "We are Muslims"

46. They don't know anything more,
 these Quran-reading *qazis*
They tell of another path,
 [yet] they say "We are Muslims"

47. They break hearts with their lack of thought,
 not even this do they remember
The true *Qazi* himself will come in the endtime,
 then he'll tell where the answer lies

48. The *qazi* reads Allah's word [*kalam*],
 but he doesn't have faith
What to fear, who is to come,
 thus they disgrace the true religion

49. They cheapen [the true religion],
 those who don't have faith in the end
This way you yourself
 disgrace the Quran

50. Mahamat speaks thus,
 these book-readers are great unbelievers [*kufar*]
They don't have inner-vision,
 so they don't take heed of the [divine] decree

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